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THE

# WORKS

OF

# DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

THO$^{s}$. BIRCH, M. A.

ALSO,

A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY COMPARED.

IN TEN VOLUMES.—VOL. VII.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY J. F. DOVE, ST. JOHN'S SQUARE;

FOR RICHARD PRIESTLEY, HIGH HOLBORN.

1820.

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# CONTENTS TO VOL. VII.

## SERMONS.

Page

CXLIV. CXLV. CXLVI.—The Goodness of God 1. 17. 36
CXLVII.—The Mercy of God - - - - - - - - - 51
CXLVIII. CXLIX.—The Patience of God - - - 75. 91
CL. CLI.—The Long-suffering of God - - - - 106. 134
CLII.—The Power of God - - - - - - - - - 150
CLIII.—The Spirituality of the Divine Nature - - - 171
CLIV.—The Immensity of the Divine Nature - - - - 188
CLV.—The Eternity of God - - - - - - - - 201
CLVI.—The Incomprehensibleness of God - - - - 212
CLVII.—God the first Cause, and last End - - - 226
CLVIII.—The Necessity of Repentance and Faith - - 241
CLIX.—Of confessing and forsaking Sin, in order to Pardon - - - - - - - - - - - - 258
CLX.—Of Confession and Sorrow for Sin - - - - 281
CLXI.—The Unprofitableness of Sin in this Life, an Argument for Repentance - - - - - - 299
CLXII. CLXIII. CLXIV. CLXV.—The Shamefulness of Sin, an Argument for Repentance, &c. 320. 338. 352. 371
CLXVI. CLXVII. CLXVIII.—The Nature and Necessity of Holy Resolution - - 398. 414. 431
CLXIX. CLXX.—The Nature and Necessity of Restitution - - - - - - - - - - - 447. 465

Digitized by Google

Page

CLXXI.—The Usefulness of Consideration, in order to Repentance - - - - - - - - - - - 486

CLXXII.—The Danger of Impenitence where the Gospel is preached - - - - - - - - - - 503

CLXXIII. CLXXIV. CLXXV.—Of the Immortality of the Soul, as discovered by Nature and by Revelation - - - - - - - 520. 541. 563

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# SERMONS.

## SERMON CXLIV.

### THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

*The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*—PSAL. CXLV. 9.

IN the handling of this argument, I proposed to do these four things:

First, To consider what is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, To shew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, To consider the effects of the Divine goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of its objects. And,

Fourthly, To answer some objections which may seem to contradict, and bring in question, the goodness of God.

I have considered the two first; and in speaking to the third, I proposed the considering these two things:

I. The universal extent of God's goodness to all his creatures.

II. More especially the goodness of God to man,



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which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and be affected with.

The first of these appears in these four particulars:

1. In his giving being to so many creatures.

2. In making them all so very good; considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them.

3. In his continual preservation of them.

4. In his providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.

The first of these I spoke largely to; I proceed to shew, in the

2. Second place, That the universal goodness of God appears in making all these creatures so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them. His goodness excited and set a-work his power to make this world, and all the creatures in it; and, that they might be made in the best manner that could be, his wisdom directed his power; he hath made all things in number, weight, and measure; so that they are admirably fitted and proportioned to one another: and that there is an excellent contrivance in all sorts of beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony in the whole frame of things, is, I think, sufficiently visible to every discerning and unprejudiced mind. The lowest form of creatures, I mean those which are destitute of sense, do all of them contribute, some way or other, to the use, and conveniency, and comfort, of the creatures above them, which being endowed with sense, are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being so palpable in the greatest part of them, may reasonably be presumed, though it be not so discernible, concerning

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all the rest; so that when we survey the whole creation of God, and the several parts, we may well cry out with David, (Psal. civ. 24.) "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all."

It is true, indeed, there are degrees of perfection in the creatures, and God is not equally good to all of them. Those creatures which are of more noble and excellent natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of perfection, they partake more of his goodness, and are more glorious instances of it; but every creature partakes of the Divine goodness in a certain degree, and according to the nature and capacity of it. God, if he pleased, could have made nothing but immortal spirits; and he could have made as many of these as there are individual creatures of all sorts in the world; but it seemed good to the wise Architect, to make several ranks and orders of beings, and to display his power, and goodness, and wisdom, in all imaginable variety of creatures, all of which should be good in their kind, though far short of the perfection of angels and immortal spirits.

He that will build a house for all the uses and purposes of which a house is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; must not so contrive it, as to make it all rooms of state and entertainment; but there must of necessity be in it meaner materials, rooms and offices for several uses and purposes, which, however inferior to the rest in dignity and degree, do yet contribute to the beauty and advantage of the whole: so, in this great frame of the world, it was fit there should be variety and different degrees of perfection in the several parts of it; and this is so far from being an impeach-



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ment of the wisdom or goodness of Him that made it, that it is an evidence of both: for the meanest of all God's creatures is good, considering the nature and rank of it, and the end to which it was designed; and we cannot imagine how it could have been ordered and framed better, though we can easily tell how it might have been worse, and that if this or that had been wanting, or had been otherwise, it had not been so good; and those who have been most conversant in the contemplation of nature, and of the works of God, have been most ready to make this acknowledgment.

But then, if we consider the creatures of God with relation to one another, and with regard to the whole frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithstanding this or that kind of creatures be much less perfect than another, and there be a very great distance between the perfection of a worm, and of an angel; yet, considering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the creation, it is as good as could be, considering its nature and use, and the place allotted to it among the creatures.

And this difference in the works of God, between the goodness of the several parts of the creation, and the excellent and perfect goodness of the whole, the Scripture is very careful to express to us in the history of the creation, where you find God represented, as first looking upon and considering every day's work by itself, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good; (Gen. i. 4. 10. 12. 18. 21. 25.) at the end of every day's work it is said, that "God saw it, and it was good:" but then, when all was finished, and he surveyed the whole together, it is said, (ver. 31.) that "God saw every thing that he

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had made, and behold, it was very good:" "very good," that is, the best; the Hebrews having no other superlative. Every creature of God, by itself, is good; but take the whole together, and they are "very good," the best that could be.

3. The universal goodness of God further appears in the careful and continual preservation of the things which he hath made; his upholding and maintaining the several creatures in being, in their natural state and order; those which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them; in his preserving the whole world, his managing and governing this vast frame of things in such sort, as to keep it from running into confusion and disorder. This is a clear demonstration, no less of the goodness than of the wisdom and power of God, that for so many ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and performed the offices and work for which nature designed them; and that the world is not, in the course of so many thousand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the frame of things doth not dissolve and fall in pieces.

And the goodness of God doth not only take care of the main, and support the whole frame of things, and preserve the more noble and considerable creatures, but even the least and meanest of them. The providence of God doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor despise any of the works of his hands, so as to let them relapse, and fall back into nothing, through neglect and inadvertency; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, (Psal. civ. 27, 28.) where the Psalmist, speaking of the innumerable multitude of creatures upon the earth and in the sea, "These (saith he) wait all upon thee,

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that thou mayest give them their meat in due season; that thou givest them, they gather; thou openest thine hand, and they are filled with good." And to the same purpose, (Psal. cxlv. 15, 16.) "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season; thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." The inanimate creatures, which are without sense, and the brute creatures, which, though they have sense, are without understanding, and so can have no end and design of self-preservation, God preserves them, no less than men, who are endowed with reason and foresight to provide for themselves: (Psal. xxxvi. 6.) "Thou preservest man and beast." And, (Ps. cxlvii. 9.) "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." And so our Saviour declares to us the particular providence of God towards those creatures: (Matt. vi. 26.) "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." (Ver. 28, 29.) "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

And though all the creatures below man, being without understanding, can take no notice of this bounty of God to them, nor make any acknowledgments to him for it; yet man, who is the priest of the visible creation, and placed here in this great temple of the world, to offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, for his universal goodness to all his creatures, ought to bless God in their behalf, and to sing praises to him in the name of all the inferior creatures, which are subjected to his dominion and use; because they are all, as it were,

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his family, his servants and utensils; and if God should neglect any of them, and suffer them to perish and miscarry, it is we that should find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we should on their behalf celebrate the praises of God; as we find David often does in the Psalms, calling upon the inanimate and the brute creatures to praise the Lord.

4. The universal goodness of God doth yet further appear, in providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all his creatures, so far as they are capable and sensible of it. He doth not only support and preserve his creatures in being, but takes care that they should all enjoy that happiness and pleasure which their natures are capable of. The creatures endowed with sense and reason, which only are capable of pleasure and happiness, God hath taken care to satisfy the several appetites and inclinations which he hath planted in them; and according as nature hath enlarged their desires and capacities, so he enlargeth his bounty towards them; "he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." God doth not immediately bring meat to the creatures when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it, and to encourage self-preservation, and to oblige and instigate them to it; and that they might not be melancholy and weary of life, he hath so ordered the nature of living creatures, that hunger and thirst are most implacable desires, exceeding painful, and even intolerable; and likewise, that the satisfaction of these appetites should be a mighty pleasure to them. And

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for those creatures that are young, and not able to provide for themselves, God hath planted in all creatures a στοργη, a natural affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon seeking provisions for them, and cherishing them, with that care and tenderness which their weak and helpless condition doth require: and reason is not more powerful and effectual in mankind to this purpose, than this natural instinct is in brute creatures; which shews what care God hath taken, and what provision he hath made, in the natural frame of all his creatures, for the satisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the satisfaction whereof is their pleasure and happiness. And thus I have done with the first head I proposed, the universal extent of God's goodness to his creatures: let us now proceed, in the

II. Second place, To consider more particularly the goodness of God to men; which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no farther than our own observation and experience, to prove the goodness of God; every day of our lives we see and taste that the Lord is good; all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the Divine goodness: "every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," (Jam. i. 17.) And the best and most perfect of his gifts he bestows on the sons of men. What is said of the wisdom of God, (Prov. viii.) may be applied to his goodness; the goodness of God shines forth in all the works of the creation, in the heavens and clouds above, and in the fountains of the great deep, in the earth and the fields, but its delight is with the sons of men.

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Such is the goodness of God to man, that it is represented to us in Scripture under the notion of love: God is good to all his creatures, but he is only said to love the sons of men. More particularly the goodness of God to man appears,

1. That he hath given us such noble and excellent beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his creatures. We owe to him that we are, and what we are: we do not only partake of that effect of his goodness which is common to us with all other creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him for his more especial goodness, that he hath made us reasonable creatures of that kind which we should have chosen to have been of, if we could suppose that, before we were, it had been referred to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this visible world. But we did not contrive and choose this condition for ourselves, we are no ways accessary to the dignity and excellency of our beings: but God chose this condition for us, and made us what we are; so that we may say with David, (Psal. c. 3—5.) "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. O enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and speak good of his name: for the Lord is good." The goodness of God is the spring and fountain of our beings; but for that, we had been nothing; and but for his farther goodness, we might have been any thing, of the lowest and meanest rank of his creatures. But the goodness of God hath been pleased to advance us to be the top and perfection of the visible creation; he hath been pleased to endow us with mind and understanding, and made us capable of happiness, in the knowledge,



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and love, and enjoyment of himself. He hath curiously and wonderfully wrought the frame of our bodies, so as to make them fit habitations for reasonable souls, and immortal spirits; he hath made our very bodies vessels of honour, when of the very same clay he hath made innumerable other creatures of a much lower rank and condition: so that though man, in respect of his body, be akin to the earth, yet, in regard of his soul, he is allied to Heaven, of a Divine original, and descended from above. Of all the creatures in this visible world, man is the chief; and what is said of behemoth, or the elephant, (Job xl.) in respect of his great strength, and the vast bigness of his body, is only true absolutely of man, that he is, *Divini opificii caput*; "the chief of the ways of God, and upon earth there is none like him."

The Psalmist takes particular notice of the goodness of God to man, in this respect of the excellency and dignity of his being; (Psal. viii. 5.) "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." And this advantage of our nature above other creatures we ought thankfully to acknowledge, though most men are so stupid as to overlook it; as Elihu complains, (Job xxxv. 10, 11.) "None saith, Where is God my Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?"

2. The goodness of God to man appears, in that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for our use. The beauty and usefulness of the creatures below us, their plain subserviency to our necessity, and benefit, and delight, are so many clear evidences of the Divine goodness to us, not only discernible to our reason, but even palpable to our

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senses, so that we may "see and taste that the Lord is gracious."

This David particularly insists upon as a special ground of praise and thanksgiving to God, that he hath subjected so great a part of the creation to our dominion and use: (Psal. viii. 6—8.) speaking of man, "Thou hast made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field: the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." What an innumerable variety of creatures are there in this inferior world, which were either solely or principally made for the use and service, pleasure and delight, of man! How many things are there, which serve for the necessity and support, for the contentment and comfort, of our lives! How many things for the refreshment and delight of our senses, and the exercise and employment of our understandings! That God hath not made man for the service of other creatures, but other creatures for the service of man, Epictetus doth very ingeniously argue from this observation; that the creatures below man, the brute beasts, have all things in a readiness, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging; so that they have no absolute need that any should build houses, or make clothes, or store up provision, or prepare and dress meat for them: "For, (says he,) being made for the service of another, they ought to be furnished with these things, that they may be always in a readiness to serve their lord and master; a plain evidence that they were made to serve man, and not man to serve them."

And to raise our thoughts of God's goodness to



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us the sons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the creatures below us for our use and convenience, so hath he appointed the creatures above us for our guard and protection, not to say for our service: (Psal. xxxiv. 7.) "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" and then it follows, "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" And, (Psal. xci. 11, 12.) "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways: they shall bear thee up in their hands." Nay, the apostle speaks as if their whole business and employment were to attend upon, and be serviceable to, good men; (Heb. i. 14.) "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

The goodness of God to men appears in his tender love, and peculiar care of us above the rest of the creatures, being ready to impart, and dispense to us the good that is suitable to our capacity and condition, and concerned to exempt us from those manifold evils of want and pain, to which we are obnoxious: I do not mean an absolute exemption from all sorts and degrees of evil, and a perpetual tenure of temporal happiness, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not suitable to our present state, and the rank and order which we are in among the creatures; nor would it be best for us, all things considered. But the goodness of God to us above other creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency of our natures above them; for, as the apostle reasons in another case, "Doth God take care for oxen," and shall he not much more extend his care to man? To this purpose our Saviour reasons: (Matt. vi. 26.) "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather

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into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" And, (ver. 30.) "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you?" And, (chap. x. 29—31.) "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." It is true, God hath a special care of his people and servants, above the rest of mankind; but our Saviour useth these arguments to his disciples, to convince them of the providence of God towards them, as men, and of a more excellent nature than other creatures.

And, indeed, we are born into the world more destitute and helpless than other creatures; as if it were on purpose to shew that God had reserved us for his more peculiar care and providence; which is so great, that the Scripture, by way of condescension, expresseth it to us by the name of love; so that what effects of care the greatest and tenderest affection in men is apt to produce towards one another, that, and much more, is the effect of God's goodness to us; and this affection of God is common to all men (though, of all creatures, we have least deserved it), and is ready to diffuse and shed abroad itself, wherever men are qualified for it by duty and obedience, and do not obstruct and stop the emanations of it, by their sins and provocations.

And though the greatest part of mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a stop to his goodness, though it cause many abatements of it, and hinder many good things from us; but such is the goodness of God, notwithstanding the evil and undutiful-

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ness of men, that he is pleased still to concern himself in the government of the world, and to preserve the societies of men from running into utter confusion and disorder; notwithstanding the violence and irregularities of men's wills and passions, the communities of men subsist upon tolerable terms; and notwithstanding the rage and craft of evil men, poor and unarmed innocence and virtue is usually protected, and sometimes rewarded in this world, and domineering and outrageous wickedness is very often remarkably checked and chastised. All which instances of God's providence, as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of mankind, so are they an effectual declaration of that goodness which governs all things, and of God's kind care of the affairs and concernments of men; so that if we look no further than this world, we may say with David, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the earth."

I know this argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpose: that if goodness governed the world, and administered the affairs of it, good and evil would not be so carelessly and promiscuously dispensed; good men would not be so great sufferers, nor wicked men so prosperous, as many times they are.

But this also, if rightly considered, is an effect of God's goodness, and infinite patience to mankind, that "he causeth his sun to rise, and his rain to fall upon the just and unjust;" that, upon the provocations of men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confusion and ruin: this plainly shews, that he designs this life for the trial of men's virtue and obedience, in order to the greater reward of it; and therefore "he suffers men to walk

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in their own ways," without any great check and control, and reserves the main bulk of rewards and punishments for another world: so that all this is so far from being any objection against the goodness of God, that, on the contrary, it is an argument of God's immense goodness, and infinite patience, that the world subsists and continues, and that he permits men to take their course, for the fuller trial of them, and the clearer and more effectual declaration of his justice, in the rewards and punishments of another life.

Fourthly, and lastly, The goodness of God to mankind most gloriously appears, in the provision he hath made for our eternal happiness. What the happiness of man should have been, had he continued in innocency, is not particularly revealed to us; but this is certain, that by wilful transgressions we have forfeited all that happiness which our natures are capable of. In this lapsed and ruinous condition of mankind, the goodness and mercy of God was pleased to employ his wisdom for our recovery, and to restore us not only to a new but a greater capacity of glory and happiness. And in order to this, the Son of God assumes our nature for the recovery and redemption of man; and the pardon of sin is purchased for us by his blood; eternal life, and the way to it, are clearly discovered to us. God is pleased to enter into a new and better covenant with us, and to afford us inward grace and assistance, to enable us to perform the conditions of it; and graciously to accept of our faith and repentance, of our sincere resolutions and endeavours of holiness and obedience, for perfect and complete righteousness, for His sake who fulfilled all righteousness.

This is the great and amazing goodness of God

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to mankind, that, when we were in open rebellion against him, he should entertain thoughts of peace and reconciliation; and when he passed by the fallen angels, he should set his affection and love upon the sinful and miserable sons of men. And "herein is the love of God to men perfected," that, as he hath made all creatures, both above us, and below us, subservient and instrumental to our subsistence and preservation; so, for the ransom of our souls from eternal ruin and misery, "he hath not spared his own Son, but hath given him up to death for us;" him, whom "he hath commanded all the angels of God to worship," and to whom he hath made subject all creatures in heaven and earth: him, "who made the world, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

And after such a stupendous instance as this, what may we not reasonably hope for, and promise ourselves, from the Divine goodness? So the apostle hath taught us to reason; (Rom. viii. 32.) "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

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# SERMON CXLV.

## THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

*The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*—PSALM CXLV. 9.

IN handling this argument, I proceeded in this method;

First, To consider what is the proper notion of goodness.

Secondly, To shew that this perfection of goodness belongs to God.

Thirdly, I considered the effects of the Divine goodness, under these heads:

I. The universal extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and design of the things created by him, and his preservation, and providing for the welfare and happiness of them.

II. I considered more particularly the goodness of God to mankind, of which I gave these four instances:

1. That he hath given us such noble beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciseth so peculiar a providence over us above the rest, that though he is said to be "good to all," he is only said to "love the sons of men."

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal life and happiness. There only now remains the

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Fourth and last particular to be spoken to, which was, To answer some objections which may seem to contradict and bring in question the goodness of God; and they are many, and have (some of them especially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great consideration and care, to give a clear and satisfactory answer to them, which, undoubtedly, they are capable of; the goodness of God being one of the most certain and unquestionable truths in the world. I shall mention those which are most considerable and obvious, and do almost of themselves spring up in every man's mind; and they are these four: the first of them more general, the other three more particular.

First, If God be so exceeding good, whence comes it to pass, that there is so much evil in the world of several kinds; evil of imperfection, evil of affliction or suffering, and (which is the greatest of all others, and indeed the cause of them) evil of sin?

Secondly, The doctrine of absolute reprobation; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greatest part of mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin or fault: this seems notoriously to contradict, not only the notion of infinite goodness, but any competent measure and degree of goodness.

Thirdly, The eternal misery and punishment of men for temporal faults seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of goodness which we suppose to be in God.

Fourthly, The instances of God's great severity to mankind upon occasion in those great calamities which, by the providence of God, have, in several ages, either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations; and here I shall confine myself to

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Scripture instances, as being the most certain and remarkable, or at least equal to any that are to be met with in history; as, the early and universal degeneracy of mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first parents; the destruction of the world by a general deluge; the sudden and terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, by fire and brimstone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites, by the express command of God; and lastly, the great calamities which befel the Jewish nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the destruction of Jerusalem.

These are the objections against the goodness of God, which I shall severally consider, and, with all the brevity and clearness I can, endeavour to return a particular answer to them.

The first objection, which I told you is more general, is this: If God be so exceeding good, whence then comes it to pass, that there is so much evil in the world of several kinds? It is evident, beyond denial, that evil abounds in the world: "The whole world lies in evil," says St. John, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, "lies in wickedness," (so our translation renders it) is involved in sin; but, by the article and opposition, St. John seems to intend the devil: "We know (says he) that we are of God, and the whole world, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, is subject to the evil one," and under his power and dominion. Which way soever we render it, it signifies that evil of one kind or other reigns in the world. Now, can evil come from a good God? "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing? Doth a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter? This cannot be," as St. James speaks in another

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case. But all evils that are in the world, must either be directly procured by the Divine Providence, or permitted to happen; and, next to the causing and procuring of evil, it seems to be contrary to the goodness of God to permit that there should be any such thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

Answer.—To give an account of this: it was an ancient doctrine of some of the most ancient nations, that there were two first causes or principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad; which, among the Persians, were called Oromasdes and Arimanius; among the Egyptians, Osiris and Typhon; among the Chaldeans, good or bad planets; among the Greeks, Ζεὺς and Ἅδης: Plutarch expressly says, that the good principle was called God, and the bad, Dæmon, or the devil; in conformity to which ancient traditions, the Manichees (a sad sect of Christians) set up two principles; the one infinitely good, which they supposed to be the original cause of all good that is in the world; the other infinitely evil, to which they ascribed all the evils that are in the world.

But, besides that the notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpose to suppose two opposite principles of equal power and force. That the very notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction will be very clear, if we consider, that what is infinitely evil must be infinitely imperfect, and, consequently, infinitely weak; and, for that reason, though never so mischievous and malicious, yet, being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and foolish, would neither be in a capacity to contrive mischief, nor to execute it. But admit that a being infinitely mischievous were infinitely cunning, and infinitely

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powerful, yet it could do no evil; because the opposite principle of infinite goodness being also infinitely wise and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands: so that, upon this supposition, the notion of a Deity would signify just nothing, and by virtue of the eternal opposition and equality of these two principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual bay, and, being an equal match for one another, instead of being two deities, they would be two idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

But to return a more distinct and satisfactory answer to this objection: There are three sorts of evil in the world; the evil of imperfection, the evil of affliction and suffering, and the evil of sin.

And, first, for the evil of imperfection, I mean natural imperfections, these are not simply and absolutely, but only comparatively evil: now comparative evil is but a less degree of goodness; and it is not at all inconsistent with the goodness of God that some creatures should be less good than others; that is, imperfect in comparison of them; nay, it is very agreeable, both to the goodness and wisdom of God, that there should be this variety in the creatures, and that they should be of several degrees of perfection, being made for several uses and purposes, and to be subservient to one another, provided they all contribute to the harmony and beauty of the whole.

Some imperfection is necessarily involved in the very nature and condition of a creature; as, that it derives its being from another, and necessarily depends upon it, and is beholden to it, and is likewise of necessity finite and limited in its nature and perfections; and as for those creatures which are less

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perfect than others, this also, that there should be degrees of perfection, is necessary, upon supposition, that the wisdom of God thinks fit to display itself in variety of creatures of several kinds and ranks; for though, comparing the creatures with one another, the angelical nature is best and most perfect, yet it is absolutely best that there should be other creatures besides angels. There are many parts of the creation which are rashly and inconsiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as some noxious and hurtful creatures, which yet, in other respects, and to some purposes, may be very useful, and against the harm and mischief whereof we are sufficiently armed, by such means of defence, and such antidotes, as reason and experience are able to find and furnish us withal; and those parts of the world which we think of little or no use, as rocks and deserts, and that vast wilderness of the sea, if we consider things well, are of great use to several very considerable purposes; or, if we can discern no other use of them, they serve at least to help our dulness, and to make us more attentively to consider and to admire the perfection and usefulness of the rest; at the worst they may serve for foils to set off the wise order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expresseth it very well) they may be like a blackmoor's head in a picture, which gives the greater beauty to the whole piece.

Secondly, For the evils of affliction and suffering; and these either befal brute creatures, or men endowed with reason and consideration.

1st, For those which befal the brute creatures; those sufferings which nature inflicts upon them are very few; the greatest they meet withal are from men, or upon their account, for whose sake they

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were chiefly made, and to whose reasonable use and gentle dominion they are consigned.

It is necessary, from the very nature of these creatures, that they should be passive, and liable to pain; and yet it doth in no wise contradict either the wisdom or goodness of God to make such creatures, because all these pains are, for the most part, fully recompensed by the pleasure these creatures find in life; and that they have such a pleasure and happiness in life is evident, in that all creatures, notwithstanding the miseries they endure, are still fond of life, and unwilling to part with it: no creature but man (who only hath perverted his nature) ever seeks the destruction of itself; and, since all brute creatures are so loath to go out of being, we may probably conclude, that if they could deliberate whether they should be or not, they would choose to come into being, even upon these hard conditions.

But, however that be, this we are sure of, that they suffer chiefly from us, and upon our account; we, who are their natural lords, having depraved ourselves first, are become cruel and tyrannical to them; nay, the Scripture tells us, that they suffer for our sakes, and "the whole creation groaneth, and is in bondage" for the sin of man. And this is not unreasonable, that, being made principally for man, they should suffer upon his account, as a part of his goods and estate, not as a punishment to them (which, under the notion of punishment, they are not capable of), but as a punishment to him who is the lord and owner of them, they being, by this means, become more weak and frail, and less useful and serviceable to him for whom they were made; so that the sufferings of the creatures below us are,

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in a great measure, to be charged upon us, under whose dominion God hath put them.

2dly, As for the afflictions and sufferings which befal men, these are not natural, and of God's making, but the result and fruit of our own doings, the effects and consequences of the ill use of our own liberty, and free choice; and God does not willingly send them upon us, but we wilfully pull them down upon ourselves; for "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," as the prophet tells us, (Lam. iii. 33.) Or, as it is in the Wisdom of Solomon, (chap. i. 12, 13.) "God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living; but men pull destruction upon themselves, with the works of their own hands." All the evils that are in the world, are either the effects of our own sin, as poverty, and disgrace, pains, diseases, and death, which are sometimes more immediately inflicted upon men by a visible providence and hand of God, but are usually brought upon us by ourselves, in the natural course and order of things; or they are the effects of other men's sins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetousness, by the malice and cruelty, of others: and these evils, though they are procured and caused by others, yet they are deserved by ourselves; and though they are immediately from the hand of men, yet we ought to look farther, and consider them as directed and disposed by the providence of God; as David did when Shimei cursed him; "God (saith he) hath bid him curse David," though it immediately proceeded from Shimei's insolence and ill-nature.

Now, upon the supposition of sin, the evils of affliction and suffering are good, because they are of great use to us, and serve to very good ends and purposes.

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1. As they are the proper punishments of sin. Evil is good to them that do evil; that is, it is fit and proper, just and due: (Psal. cvii. 17.) "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." And it is fit they should be so; crooked to crooked, is straight and right. "A rod for the back of fools," saith Solomon; and elsewhere, "God hath made every thing for that which is fit for it, and the evil day for the wicked man."

2. As they are the preventions and remedies of greater evils. Evils of affliction and suffering are good for wicked men, to bring them to a sense of their sin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal evils, and preserve them from eternal misery; and not only good to the person that suffers, but likewise to others, to deter and affright them from the like sins; to prevent the contagion of sin, and to stop the progress of iniquity, upon which greater guilt and worse mischiefs might ensue; and they are good to good men, to awaken and rouse them out of their security, to make them know God and themselves better; they are almost a necessary discipline for the best of men, much more for evil and depraved dispositions; and we might as reasonably expect that there should be no rod in a school, as that there should be no suffering and afflictions in the world.

3. As they are the occasions and matter of many virtues. God teacheth men temperance by want, and patience by reproach and sufferings, charity by persecution, and pity and compassion to others by grievous pains upon ourselves. The benefit of afflictions, to them that make a wise use of them, is unspeakable; they are grievous in themselves,



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"Nevertheless (saith the apostle to the Hebrews) they bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to them that are exercised therewith." David gives a great testimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them, from his own experience; (Psal. cxix. 67.) "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." And, (ver. 71.) "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."

4. The evils of suffering, patiently submitted to, and decently borne, do greatly contribute to the increase of our happiness. All the persecutions and sufferings of good men in this life, "do work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And if they contribute to our greater good and happiness at last, they are good. The glorious reward of the sufferings which we have met with in this life, will in the next clear up the goodness and justice of the Divine Providence from all those mists and clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from those objections which are now raised against it, upon account of the afflictions and sufferings of good men in this life, which "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in them."

Thirdly, As for the evil of sin, which is the great difficulty of all, how is it consistent with the goodness of God, to permit so great an evil as this to come into the world? For answer to this, I desire these two things may be considered:

1. That it doth not at all contradict the wisdom or goodness of God, to make a creature of such a frame, as to be capable of having its obedience tried, in order to the reward of it; which could not be, unless such a creature were made mutable, and,

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by the good or bad use of its liberty, capable of obeying or disobeying the laws of his Creator; for where there is no possibility of sinning, there can be no trial of our virtue and obedience; and nothing but virtue and obedience are capable of reward. The goodness of God towards us is sufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happiness, and gave us sufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end; and it does in no wise contradict his goodness, that he does not, by his omnipotency, interpose to prevent our sin: for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let man be the creature he made him, capable of reward or punishment, according to the good or bad use of his own free choice. It is sufficient that God made man good at first, though mutable, and that he had a power to have continued so, though he wilfully determined himself to evil: this acquits the goodness of God, that "he made man upright," but he found out to himself many inventions.

2. If there had not been such an order and rank of creatures as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifestation of God's goodness in a way of mercy and patience: so that though God be not the author of the sins of men, yet, in case of their wilful transgression and disobedience, the goodness of God hath a fair opportunity of discovering itself, in his patience and long-suffering to sinners, and in his merciful care and provision for their recovery out of that miserable state. And this may suffice for answer to the first objection—if God be so good, whence then comes evil?

The second objection against the goodness of God, is from the doctrine of absolute reprobation:



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by which I mean, the decreeing the greatest part of mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin and fault. This seems not only notoriously to contradict the notion of infinite goodness, but to be utterly inconsistent with the least measure and degree of goodness. Indeed, if by reprobation were only meant that God, in his own infinite knowledge, foresees the sins and wickedness of men, and hath from all eternity determined in himself, what in his word he hath so plainly declared, that he will punish impenitent sinners with everlasting destruction; or if by reprobation be meant, that God hath not elected all mankind, that is, absolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to salvation: neither of these notions of reprobation is any ways inconsistent with the goodness of God; for he may foresee the wickedness of men, and determine to punish it, without any impeachment of his goodness: he may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the same degree: if God please to bring any infallibly to salvation, this is transcendent goodness; but if he put all others into a capacity of it, and use all necessary and fitting means to make them happy, and, after all this, any fall short of happiness through their own wilful fault and obstinacy; these men are evil and cruel to themselves, but God hath been very good and merciful to them.

But if by reprobation be meant, either that God hath decreed, without respect to the sins of men, their absolute ruin and misery, or that he hath decreed that they shall inevitably sin and perish; it cannot be denied, but that such a reprobation as this doth clearly overthrow all possible notion of goodness. I have told you, that the true and only

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notion of goodness in God is this, that it is a propension and disposition of the Divine nature, to communicate being and happiness to his creatures: but surely, nothing can be more plainly contrary to a disposition to make them happy, than an absolute decree, and a peremptory resolution to make them miserable. God is infinitely better than the best of men, and yet none can possibly think that man a good man, who should absolutely resolve to disinherit and destroy his children, without the foresight and consideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the goodness of God; but it is not an easy matter to devise or say any thing worse than this of the devil.

But it is said, reprobation is an act of sovereignty in God, and therefore not to be measured by the common rules of goodness. But it is contrary to goodness, and plainly inconsistent with it; and we must not attribute such a sovereignty to God, as contradicts his goodness; for if the sovereignty of God may break in at pleasure upon his other attributes, then it signifies nothing, to say that God is good, and wise, and just, if his sovereignty may at any time act contrary to these perfections.

Now, if the doctrine of absolute reprobation, and the goodness of God, cannot possibly stand together, the question is, which of them ought to give way to the other? What St. Paul determines in another case, concerning the truth and fidelity of God, will equally hold concerning his goodness; "Let God be" good, "and every man a liar." The doctrine of absolute reprobation is no part of the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, that ever I could find; and there is the rule of our faith. If some great divines have held this doctrine, not in opposition to

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the goodness of God, but hoping they might be reconciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the schools of the greatest divines be called in question, than the goodness of God, which, next to his being, is the greatest and clearest truth in the world.

Thirdly, It is farther objected, that the eternal punishment of men, for temporal faults, seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of goodness, which we suppose to be in God.

This objection I have fully answered, in a discourse upon St. Matthew, (chap. xxv. 46.) and therefore shall proceed to the

Fourth and last objection against the goodness of God, from sundry instances of God's severity to mankind, in those great calamities which, by the providence of God, have, in several ages, either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations.

And here I shall confine myself to Scripture instances, as being most known, and most certain and remarkable, or at least equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other history: such are the early and universal degeneracy of all mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first parents; the destruction of the world by a general deluge; the sudden and terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, by fire and brimstone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites, by the express command of God; and, lastly, the great calamities which befel the Jewish nation, especially the final ruin and dispersion of them at the destruction of Jerusalem: these, and the like instances of God's severity, seem to call in question his goodness.

Against these severe and dreadful instances of

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God's severity, it might be a sufficient vindication of his goodness, to say, in general, that they were all upon great and high provocations; and most of them after a long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readiness in God to have prevented or removed them, upon repentance; all which are great instances of the goodness of God: but yet, for the clearer manifestation of the Divine goodness, I shall consider them particularly and as briefly as I can.

1. As for the transgression of our first parents, and the dismal consequences of it to all their posterity: this is a great depth; and though the Scripture mentions it, yet it speaks but little of it; and in matters of mere revelation, we must not attempt "to be wise above what is written." Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and wilful disobedience to a very plain and easy command; and that, in the punishment of it, God mitigated the extremity of the sentence (which was present death), by granting our first parents the reprieve of almost a thousand years: and as to the consequences of it to their posterity, God did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of mankind; and, though he removed them out of that happy state and place in which man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon earth: and, which is certainly the most glorious instance of Divine goodness that ever was, he was pleased to make the fall and misery of man, the happy occasion of sending his Son in our nature for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition than that from which we fell So the apostle tells us, at large, (Romans v.) that "the grace of God by Jesus Christ," hath redounded

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much more to our benefit and advantage, than "the sin and disobedience of our first parents" did to our prejudice.

2. For the general deluge, though it look very severe, yet, if we consider it well, we may plainly discern much of goodness in it; it was upon great provocation, by the universal corruption and depravation of mankind: "The earth was filled with violence, and all flesh had corrupted its ways; the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;" which is not a description of original sin, but of the actual and improved wickedness of mankind: and yet, when the wickedness of men was come to this height, God gave them fair warning, before he brought this calamity upon them, "when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah," for the space of "a hundred and twenty years;" at last, when nothing would reclaim them, and almost the whole race of mankind were become so very bad, that it is said, "it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart;" when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue so, God, in pity to mankind, and to put a stop to their growing wickedness and guilt, swept them away all at once from the face of the earth, except one family, which he had preserved from this contagion, to be a new seminary of mankind, and, as the heathen poet expresseth it, *Mundi melioris origo*, "The source and original of a better race."

3. For that terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven, it was not brought upon them till "the cry of their sin was great, and gone up to heaven;" until, by their un-

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natural lusts, they had provoked supernatural vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms God was pleased to condescend to Abraham for the sparing of them; (Gen. xviii. 32.) if in those five cities there had been found "but ten righteous persons, he would not have destroyed them for those ten's sake." So that we may say with the apostle, "Behold the goodness and severity of God!" Here was wonderful goodness mixed with this great severity.

4. For the extirpation of the Canaanites, by the express command of God, which hath such an appearance of severity, it is to be considered, that this vengeance was not executed upon them, until they were grown ripe for it. God spared them for above four hundred years, for so long their growing impiety is taken notice of, (Gen. xv. 16.) where it is said that "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full:" God did not proceed to cut them off until their case was desperate, past all hopes of recovery, until "the land was defiled with abominations," and surcharged with wickedness to that degree, as to "spew out its inhabitants;" as is expressly said, Levit. xviii. 28. When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to spare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and misery to themselves.

Fifthly, and lastly, As for the great calamities which God brought upon the Jews, especially in their final ruin and dispersion at the destruction of Jerusalem; not to insist upon the known history of their multiplied rebellions and provocations, of their despiteful usage of God's prophets whom he sent to warn them of his judgments, and to call them to repentance; of their obstinate refusal to receive correction, and to be brought to amend-

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ment, by any means that God could use; for all which provocations, he at last delivered them into their enemies' hands, to carry them away captive: not to insist upon this, I shall only consider their final destruction by the Romans, which, though it be dreadfully severe, beyond any example of history, yet the provocation was proportionable; for this vengeance did not come upon them, until they had, as it were, extorted it, by the most obstinate impenitency and unbelief, in "rejecting the counsel of God against themselves," and resisting such means as would have brought Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, to repentance; until they had despised the doctrine of life and salvation, delivered to them by the Son of God, and confirmed from heaven by the clearest and greatest miracles; and by wicked hands had crucified and slain the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Nay, even after this greatest of sins that ever was committed, God waited for their repentance forty years, to see if in that time they would be brought to a sense of their sins, and to "know the things which belonged to their peace." And no wonder if, after such provocations, and so much patience, and so obstinate an impenitency, the goodness of God at last gave way to his justice, and "wrath came upon them to the utmost."

So that all these instances, rightly considered, are rather commendations of the Divine goodness, than just and reasonable objections against it; and notwithstanding the severity of them, it is evident that God is good, from the primary inclinations of his nature; and severe only upon necessity, and in case of just provocation. And to be otherwise, not to punish insolent impiety and incorrigible wicked-

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ness in a severe and remarkable manner, would not be goodness, but a fond indulgence; not patience, but stupidity; not mercy to mankind, but cruelty; because it would be an encouragement to them to do more mischief, and to bring greater misery upon themselves.

So that if we suppose God to be holy and just, as well as good, there is nothing in any of these instances, but what is very consistent with all that goodness which we can suppose to be in a holy, and wise, and just Governor, who is a declared enemy to sin, and is resolved to give all fitting discountenance to the breach and violation of his laws. It is necessary, in kindness and compassion to the rest of mankind, that some should be made remarkable instances of God's severity; that the punishment of a few may be a warning to all, that they may hear and fear, and, by avoiding the like sins, may prevent the like severity upon themselves.

And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the goodness of God; the consideration whereof is fruitful of many excellent and useful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and our duty: but these I shall refer to another opportunity.

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# SERMON CXLVI.

## THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

*The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*—PSALM CXLV. 9.

I HAVE made several discourses upon this argument of the goodness of God; shewing what it is; on what accounts we ascribe it to God; what are the effects and large extent of it to the whole creation, and more particularly to mankind; and, in the last place, considered the several objections which seem to lie against it. I proceed now to the application of this excellent argument, the consideration whereof is so fruitful of useful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and duty. And,

I. This shews us the prodigious folly and unreasonableness of atheism. Most of the atheism that is in the world, doth not so much consist in a firm persuasion that there is no God, as in vain wishes and desires that there were none. Bad men think it would be a happiness to them, and that they should be in a much better condition if there were no God, than if there be one. *Nemo deum non esse credit, nisi cui Deum non esse expedit*; "No man is apt to disbelieve a God, but he whose interest it is that there should be none." And if we could see into the hearts of wicked men, we should find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a God, he is just, and will punish sin; that he is infinite in power, and not to be resisted, and therefore kills them with his terror so often as they

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think of him: hence they apprehend it their interest that there should be no God, and wish there were none, and thence are apt to cherish in their minds a vain hope that there is none, and at last endeavour to impose upon themselves by vain reasonings, and to suppress the belief of a God, and to stifle their natural apprehensions and fears of him. So that it is not *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, "Fear that first made gods," but the fear which bad men have of Divine power and justice, that first tempted them to the disbelief of him.

But were not these men as foolish as they are wicked, they would wish with all their hearts there were a God, and be glad to believe so: and the Psalmist gives them their true character, who can entertain any such thoughts or wishes; (Psal. xiv. 1.) "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God:" for they are fools who do not understand nor consult their true interest. And if this be true which I have said concerning the goodness of God, if this be his nature, to desire and procure the happiness of his creatures; whoever understands the true nature of God, and his own true interest, cannot but wish there were a God, and be glad of any argument to prove it, and rejoice to find it true; as children are glad of a kind and tender father, and as subjects rejoice in a wise and good prince.

The goodness of God gives us a lovely character of him, makes him so good a father, so gracious a governor of men, that if there were no such being in the world, it were infinitely desirable to mankind, that there should be: he is such an one, *Qualem omnes cuperent, si deesset;* "As, if he were wanting, all men ought to wish for." The being of God is so comfortable, so convenient, so necessary to the feli-

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city of mankind, that (as Tully admirably says) *Dii immortales ad usum hominum fabricati pene videantur;* "If God were not a necessary being of himself, he might almost seem to be made on purpose for the use and benefit of men." So that atheism is not only an instance of the most horrible impiety, but of the greatest stupidity; and for men to glory in their disbelief of a God, is like the rejoicing and triumph of a furious and besotted multitude in the murder of a wise and good prince, the greatest calamity and confusion that could possibly have befallen them.

If the evidence of God's being were not so clear as it is, yet the consideration of his goodness ought to check all inclination to atheism and infidelity; for if he be as good as he is represented to us, both by natural light and Divine revelation (and he is so, as sure as he is), if he tender our welfare, and desire our happiness, as much as we ourselves can do, and use all wise ways and proper means to bring it about; then it is plainly every man's interest, even thine, O sinner! to whom, after all thy provocations, he is willing to be reconciled, that there should be such a being as God is; and whenever thou comest to thyself, thou wilt be sensible of thy want of him, and thy soul will "thirst for God, even the living God, and pant after him as the hart pants after the water-brooks;" in the day of thy affliction and calamity, "when distress and anguish cometh upon thee," thou wilt flee to God for refuge, and shelter thyself under his protection, and wouldest not, for all the world, but there were such a being in it to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo sanus timet* (says Seneca); *furor est metuere salutaria;* "No man in his wits is afraid there is a God: it is a madness to

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fear that which is so much for our benefit and advantage." Human nature is conscious to itself of its own weakness and insufficiency, and of its necessary dependance upon something without itself for its happiness; and therefore, in great extremity and distress, the atheist himself hath naturally recourse to him; and he who denied and rejected him in his prosperity, clings to him in adversity, as his only support and present help in time of trouble. And this is a sure indication, that these men, after all their endeavours to impose upon themselves, have not been able wholly to extinguish in their minds the belief of God, and his goodness; nay, it is a sign, at the bottom of their hearts, they have a firm persuasion of his goodness, when, after all their insolent defiance of him, they have the confidence to apply to him for mercy and help, "in time of need:" and therefore, our hearts ought to rise with indignation against those who go about to persuade the belief of a thing so prejudicial to our interest, to take away "the light of our eyes, and the breath of our nostrils," and to rob us of all the comfort and support which the belief of an infinite power, conducted by infinite wisdom and goodness, is apt to afford to mankind.

II. We should take great care of preventing and abusing this great goodness, by vain confidence and presumption. This is a provocation of a high nature, which the Scripture calls, "turning the grace of God into wantonness;" making that an encouragement to sin, which is one of the strongest arguments in the world against it. God is infinitely good and merciful: but we must not, therefore, think that he is fond and indulgent to our faults; but, on the contrary, because he is good, he cannot

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but hate evil. So the Scripture every where tells us, that "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" that "the face of the Lord is against them that do evil: he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity." He is ready to shew mercy to those who are qualified for it by repentance, and resolution of a better course: but as long as we continue impenitent, God is implacable, and will deal with us according to the tenor of his laws, and the desert of our doings. Despair is a great sin, but presumption is a greater: despair doubts of the goodness of God, but presumption abuseth it; despair disbelieves, but presumption perverts the best thing in the world to a quite contrary purpose from what it was intended.

III. The consideration of God's goodness, is a mighty comfort and relief to our minds, under all our fears and troubles. Great are the fears and jealousies of many devout minds concerning God's love to them, and their everlasting condition; which are commonly founded in one of these two causes, a melancholy temper, or mistaken notions and apprehensions of God; and very often these two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.

Melancholy, as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a disease not to be cured by reason and argument, but by physic and time: but the mistakes which men have entertained concerning God, if they be not set on and heightened by melancholy (as many times they are), may be rectified by a true representation of the goodness of God, confirmed by reason and Scripture. Many good men have had very hard

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and injurious thoughts of God instilled into them, from doctrines too commonly taught and received; as if he did not sincerely desire the happiness of his creatures, but had, from all eternity, decreed to make the greatest part of mankind, with a secret purpose and design, to make them miserable; and, consequently, were not serious and in a good earnest in his invitations and exhortations of sinners to repentance; and it is no wonder if such jealousies as these concerning God, make men doubtful whether God love them, and very scrupulous and anxious about their everlasting condition.

I have already told you, that these harsh doctrines have no manner of foundation, either in reason or Scripture; that God earnestly desires our happiness, and affords us sufficient means to that end; that he bears a more hearty good-will to us, than any man does to his friend, or any father upon earth ever did to his dearest child; in comparison of which, the greatest affection of men to those whom they love best, is "but as the drop of the bucket, as the very small dust upon the balance." If we have right apprehensions of God's goodness, we can have no temptation to despair of his kind and merciful intentions to us, provided we be but careful of our duty to him, and do sincerely repent and forsake our sins. Plainer declarations no words can make, than those we meet with in the Holy Scriptures, that "God hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" that "he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" that "he that



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confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall have mercy:" that "if the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, he will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon."

As for outward calamities and afflictions, the consideration of God's goodness is a firm ground of consolation to us, giving us assurance, that God will either prevent them by his providence, or support us under them, or rescue us out of them, or turn them to our greater good and happiness in this world, or the next. St. Paul speaks of it as the firm belief and persuasion of all good men, that, in the issue, all their actions should prove to their advantage: "We know (says he) that all things shall work together for good to them that love God." And one of the greatest evidences of our love to God, is a firm belief and persuasion of his goodness: if we believe his goodness, we cannot but love him; and if we love him, "all things shall work together for our good."

And this is a great cordial to those who are under grievous persecutions and sufferings,* which is the case of our brethren in a neighbouring nation, and may come to be ours, God knows how soon. But though the malice of men be great, and backed with a power not to be controlled by any visible means, and therefore likely to continue; yet the goodness of God is greater than the malice of men, and of a longer duration and continuance. And thus David comforted himself when he was persecuted by Saul; (Psal. lii. 1.) "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness

* This Sermon was preached before the late happy Revolution.

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of God endureth continually." The persecution which Saul raised against him was very powerful, and lasted a long time; but he comforts himself with this, that "the goodness of God endures for ever."

IV. The consideration of God's goodness, is a powerful motive and argument to several duties.

1. To the love of God. And this is the most proper and natural effect and operation of the goodness of God upon our minds. Several of the Divine attributes are very awful, but goodness is amiable; and, without this, nothing else is so. Power and wisdom may command dread and admiration; but nothing but goodness can challenge our love and affection. Goodness is amiable for itself, though no benefit and advantage should from thence redound to us: but when we find the comfortable effects of it, when "the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance" are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodness, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for; this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was amiable for itself. We cannot but love him who is good, and does us good; whose goodness extends to all his creatures, but is exercised in so peculiar a manner towards the sons of men, that it is called love; and if God vouchsafe to love us, well may this be "the first and great commandment, Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

2. The consideration of God's goodness is likewise an argument for us to fear him; not as a slave does his master, but as a child does his father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid he is to



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offend him. "There is forgiveness with thee, (saith the Psalmist) that thou mayest be feared:" because God is ready to forgive, we should be afraid to offend. "Men shall fear the Lord, and his goodness," saith the prophet. (Hosea iii. 5.) And, indeed, nothing is more to be dreaded than despised goodness, and abused patience, which turns into fury and vengeance: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance, (says the apostle) and treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

3. The consideration of God's goodness, is a powerful motive to obedience to his laws, and (as the apostle expresseth it) "to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." This argument Samuel useth to the people of Israel, to persuade them to obedience; (1 Sam. xii. 24.) "Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you."

And, indeed, the laws which God hath given us, are none of the least instances of his goodness to us, since they all tend to our good, and are proper causes and means of our happiness: so that, in challenging our obedience to his laws, as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his laws require of us, is to do that which is best for ourselves, and does most directly conduce to our own welfare and happiness. Considering our infinite obligations to God, he might have challenged our obedience to the severest and harshest laws he could have imposed upon us: so that as the servants said to Naaman, "Had the

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prophet bid thee to do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much more when he hath only said, Wash, and be clean?" If God had required of us things very grievous and burthensome, in love and gratitude to him, we ought to have yielded a ready and cheerful obedience to such commands; how much more when he hath only said, Do this, and be happy. In testimony of your love to me, do these things which are the greatest kindness and benefit to yourselves.

4. The goodness of God should lead men to repentance. One of the greatest aggravations of our sins is, that we offend against so much goodness, and make so bad a requital for it; "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise!" The proper tendency of God's goodness and patience to sinners, is to bring them to a sense of their miscarriage, and to a resolution of a better course. When we reflect upon the blessings and favours of God, and his continual goodness to us, can we choose but be ashamed of our terrible ingratitude and disobedience? Nothing is more apt to make an ingenuous nature to relent, than the sense of undeserved kindness; that God should be so good to us, who are evil and unthankful to him; that though we be enemies to him, yet, when we hunger, he feeds us; when we thirst, he gives us to drink; heaping, as it were, coals of fire on our heads, on purpose to melt us into repentance, and to overcome our evil by his goodness.

5. The consideration of God's goodness is a firm ground of trust and confidence. What may we not hope and assuredly expect from immense and boundless goodness? If we have right apprehensions of the goodness of God, we cannot possibly

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distrust him, or doubt of the performance of those gracious promises which he hath made to us; the same goodness which inclined him to make such promises, will effectually engage him to make them good. If God be so good as he hath declared himself, why should we think that he will not help us in our need, and relieve us in our distress, and comfort us in our afflictions and sorrows? If we may with confidence rely upon any thing to confer good upon us, and to preserve and deliver us from evil, we may trust infinite goodness.

6. The goodness of God is likewise an argument to us to patience and contentedness with every condition. If the hand of God be severe and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be assured that it is not without great cause that so much goodness is so highly offended and displeased with us; that he designs our good in all the evils he sends us, and does not chasten us for his pleasure, but for our profit; that we are the cause of our own sufferings, and our sins separate between God and us, and withhold good things from us; that in the final issue and result of things, "all things shall work together for good" to us; and therefore we ought not to be discontented at any thing which will certainly end in our happiness.

7. Let us imitate the goodness of God. The highest perfection of the best and most perfect Being is worthy to be our pattern: this Scripture frequently proposeth to us; (Matt. v. 48.) "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." How is that? In being good, and kind, and merciful, as God is: "But I say unto you, (says our Lord) love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,

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and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust:" and then it follows, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The same pattern St. Paul proposeth to us; (Ephes. iv. 32.; and chap. v. 1.) "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted; forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love." We cannot in any thing resemble God more than in goodness, and kindness, and mercy, and in a readiness to forgive those who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this perfection of God, and represent it to our minds, that, by the frequent contemplation of it, we may be transformed into the image of the Divine goodness. Is God so good to his creatures? with how much greater reason should we be so to our fellow-creatures? Is God good to us? Let us imitate his universal goodness, by endeavouring the good of mankind; and, as much as in us lies, of the whole creation of God. What God is to us, and what we would have him still be to us, that let us be to others. We are infinitely beholden to this perfection of God for all that we are, and for all that we enjoy, and for all that we expect; and therefore we have all the reason in the world to admire and imitate it. Let this pattern of the Divine goodness be continually before us, that we may be still fashioning ourselves in the temper of our minds, and in the actions of our lives, to a likeness and conformity to it.

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Lastly, The consideration of the Divine goodness should excite our praise and thankfulness: this is a great duty, to the performance whereof we should summon all the powers and faculties of our souls: as the holy Psalmist does; (Psal. ciii. 1, 2.) "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." And we should invite all others to the same work, as the same devout Psalmist frequently does; (Psal. cvi. 1.) "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." And (Psal. cvii. 8.) "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."

And we had need to be often called upon to this duty, to which we have a peculiar backwardness. Necessity drives us to prayer, and sends us to God for the supply of our wants; but praise and thanksgiving is a duty which depends upon our gratitude and ingenuity; and nothing sooner wears off, than the sense of kindness and benefits. We are very apt to forget the blessings of God, not so much from a bad memory, as from a bad nature; to forget the greatest blessings, the continuance whereof should continually put us in mind of them, the blessings of our beings. So God complains of his people; (Deut. xxxii. 18.) "Of the God that formed thee thou hast been unmindful:" the dignity and excellency of our being above all the creatures of this visible world; (Job xxxv. 10, 11.) "None saith, Where is God my Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven;" the daily comforts and blessings of our lives, which we can continually re-

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ceive, without almost ever looking up to the hand that gives them. So God complains by the prophet Hosea; (chap. ii. 8.) "She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." And is it not shameful to see how, at the most plentiful tables, the giving of God thanks is almost grown out of fashion? as if men were ashamed to own from whence these blessings came. When thanks is all God expects from us, can we not afford to give him that? "Do ye thus requite the Lord, foolish people and unwise?" It is just with God to take away his blessings from us, if we deny him this easy tribute of praise and thanksgiving.

It is a sign men are unfit for heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper work and employment of the blessed spirits above: therefore, as ever we hope to come thither, let us begin this work here, and inure ourselves to that which will be the great business of all eternity: let us, with the four-and-twenty elders in the Revelation, "fall down before him that sits on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast our crowns before the throne," (that is, cast ourselves) and ascribe all glory to God, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast made all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created."

To him, therefore, the infinite and inexhaustible fountain of goodness, the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation, who gave us such excellent beings, having made us little lower than the angels, and crowned us with glory and honour; who hath been pleased to stamp upon us the image of his own goodness, and thereby made us partakers of a Divine nature, communicating to us not only of the

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effects of his goodness, but, in some measure and degree, of the perfection itself; to Him, who gives us all things richly to enjoy which pertain to life and godliness, and hath made such abundant provision not only for our comfort and convenience in this present life, but for our unspeakable happiness to all eternity; to Him who designed this happiness to us from all eternity, and whose mercy and goodness to us endures for ever; who, when by wilful transgressions and disobedience we had plunged ourselves into a state of sin and misery, and had forfeited that happiness which we were designed to, was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of it, by sending his only Son to take our nature, with the miseries and infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for us: in a word, to Him who is infinitely good to us, not only contrary to our deserts, but beyond our hopes; who renews his mercy upon us every morning, and is patient, though we provoke him every day; who preserves and provides for us, and spares us continually; who is always willing, always watchful, and never weary to do us good: to Him be all glory and honour, adoration and praise, love and obedience, now and for ever.

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# SERMON CXLVII.

## THE MERCY OF GOD.

*The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy.*
NUMB. xiv. 18.

I HAVE considered God's goodness in general. There are two eminent branches of it—his patience and mercy. The patience of God is his goodness to them that are guilty in deferring or moderating their deserved punishment: the mercy of God is his goodness to them that are or may be miserable. It is the last of these two I design to discourse of at this time; in doing of which I shall inquire,

First, What we are to understand by the mercy of God.

Secondly, Shew you that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Consider the degree of it, that God is of great mercy.

First, What we are to understand by the mercy of God.

I told you, it is his goodness to them that are in misery, or liable to it; that is, that are in danger of it, or have deserved it. It is mercy to prevent the misery that we are liable to, and which may befal us, though it be not actually upon us. It is mercy to defer the misery that we deserve, or mitigate it; and this is, properly, patience and forbearance. It is mercy to relieve those that are in misery, to support or comfort them. It is mercy to remit the

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misery we deserve, and, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation to punishment.

Thus the mercy of God is usually, in Scripture, set forth to us by the affection of pity and compassion; which is an affection that causeth a sensible commotion and disturbance in us, upon the apprehension of some great evil that lies upon another, or hangs over him. Hence it is that God is said, in Scripture, to be grieved and afflicted for the miseries of men; his bowels are said to sound, and his heart to turn within him. But though God is pleased in this manner to set forth his mercy and tenderness towards us, yet we must take heed how we clothe the Divine nature with the infirmities of human passions. We must not measure the perfection of God by the expressions of his condescension; and, because he stoops to our weakness, level him to our infirmities. When God is said to pity us, we must take away the imperfection of his passion, the commotion and disturbance of it, and not imagine any such thing in God; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compassion of God, without producing the disquiet, do produce the effects of the most sensible pity.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God.

All the arguments that I used to prove the goodness of God, from the acknowledgment of natural light, and from Scripture and reason, serve to prove that he is merciful; because the mercy of God is an eminent branch of his goodness. I will only produce some of those many texts of Scripture which attribute this perfection to God. (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." (Deut. iv. 31.) "The Lord thy God is a merciful

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God." (2 Chron. xxxiv. 9.) "The Lord your God is gracious and merciful." (Nehem. ix. 17.) "Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." (Psal. xxv. 10.) "All the paths of the Lord are mercy." (Psal. lxii. 12.) "Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." (Psal. ciii. 8.) "Merciful and gracious." (Psal. cxxx. 7.) "With the Lord there is mercy." And so (Jer. iii. 12. Joel ii. 13. Jonah iv. 2. Luke vi. 36.) "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." The Scripture speaks of this as most natural to him. 2 Cor. i. 3, he is called "the Father of mercies." But when he punisheth, he doth, as it were, relinquish his nature, and do a "strange work." "The Lord will wait, that he may be gracious." (Isa. xxx. 18.) God passeth by opportunities of punishing, but his mercy takes opportunity to display itself: "He waits to be gracious." To afflict or punish is a work that God is unwilling to do, that he takes no pleasure in; (Lam. iii. 33.) "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." But mercy is a work that he delights in; (Micah vii. 18.) "He delighteth in mercy." When God shews mercy, he does it with pleasure and delight; he is said to rejoice over his people, to do them good. Those attributes that declare God's goodness, as when he is said to be gracious or merciful, and long-suffering, they shew what God is in himself, and delights to be: those which declare his wrath and severity, shew what he is upon provocation, and the occasion of sin; not what he chooseth to be, but what we do, as it were, compel and necessitate him to be.

Thirdly, For the degree of it; That God is a God of great mercy.

The Scripture doth delight to advance the mercy of God, and does use great variety of expression to

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magnify it: it speaks of the greatness of his mercy; (Numb. xiv. 19.) "According unto the greatness of thy mercy." (2 Sam. xxiv. 14.) "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great." It is called an abundant mercy; (1 Pet. i. 3.) "According to his abundant mercy." (Psal. ciii. 8.) He is said to be "plenteous in mercy;" and "rich in mercy," (Eph. ii. 4.) Psal. v. 6. he speaks of the multitude of God's mercies; and of the variety of them. (Nehem. ix. 19.) "In thy manifold mercies thou forsakest them not." So many are they, that we are said to be surrounded and compassed about on every side with them. (Psal. ciii. 4.) "Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

And yet further to set forth the greatness of them, the Scripture useth all dimensions. Height; (Psal. lvii. 10.) "Thy mercy is great unto the heavens." Nay, higher yet; (Psal. cviii. 4.) "Thy mercy is great above the heavens." For the latitude and extent of it, it is as large as the earth, and extends to all the creatures; (Psal. cxix. 64.) "The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy." (Psal. cxlv. 9.) "His tender mercies are over all his works." For the length, or duration and continuance of it; (Exod. xxxiv. 7.) "Laying up mercy in store for thousands of generations," one after another. Nay, it is of a longer continuance: Psal. cxviii. it is several times repeated, that "his mercy endureth for ever."

And to shew the intense degree of this affection of mercy, or pity, the Scripture useth several emphatical expressions to set it forth to us. The Scripture speaks of the tender mercies of God; (Psal. xxv. 6.) "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies." Yea, of the multitude of these; (Psal. li. 1.) "Ac-

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cording unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." (Jam. v. 11.) "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." They are called God's bowels, which are the tenderest parts, and apt to yearn and stir in us when any affections of love and pity are excited; (Isa. lxiii. 15.) "Where is the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? are they restrained?" (Luke i. 78.) "Through the tender mercy of our God;" so it is in our translation: but, if we render it from the original, it is, "through the bowels of the mercies of our God." How doth God condescend, in those pathetical expressions, which he useth concerning his people? (Hos. xi. 8.) "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together." Nay, to express his tender sense of our miseries and sufferings, he is represented as being afflicted with us, and bearing a part in our sufferings; (Isa. lxiii. 9.) "In all their afflictions he was afflicted."

The compassions of God are compared to the tenderest affections among men: to that of a father towards his children; (Psal. ciii. 13.) "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Nay, to the compassions of a mother towards her infant; (Isa. xlix. 15.) "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may," it is possible, though most unlikely: but though a mother may turn unnatural, yet God cannot be unmerciful.

In short, the Scripture doth every where magnify the mercy of God, and speak of it with all possible

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advantage; as if the Divine nature, which doth in all perfections excel all others, did in this excel itself. The Scripture speaks of it as if God was wholly taken up with it, as if it was his constant exercise and employment, so that, in comparison of it, he doth hardly display any other excellency; (Psal. xxv. 10.) "All the paths of the Lord are mercy:" as if, in this world, God had a design to advance his mercy above his other attributes. The mercy of God is now in the throne; this is the day of mercy; and God doth display it, many times, with a seeming dishonour to his other attributes, his justice, and holiness, and truth. His justice; this makes Job complain of the long life and prosperity of the wicked; (Job xxi. 7.) "Wherefore do the wicked live, yea, become old?" &c. His holiness; this makes the prophet expostulate with God, (Habak. i. 13.) "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue?" &c. And the truth of God; this makes Jonah complain, as if God's mercies were such as did make some reflection upon his truth. (Jonah iv. 2.)

But that we may have more distinct apprehensions of the greatness and number of God's mercies, I will distribute them into kinds, and rank them under several heads. It is mercy, to prevent those evils and miseries that we are liable to: it is mercy, to defer those evils that we have deserved, or to mitigate them: it is mercy, to support and comfort us when misery is upon us; it is mercy, to deliver us from them: but the greatest mercy of all is, to remit the evil and misery we have deserved, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away

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the obligation to punishment. So that the mercy of God may be reduced to these five heads:

I. Preventing mercy. Many evils and miseries which we are liable to, God prevents them at a great distance; and when they are coming towards us, he stops them, or turns them another way. The merciful providence of God, and those invisible guards which protect us, do divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We seldom take notice of God's preventing mercy; we are not apt to be sensible how great a mercy it is to be freed from those straits and necessities, those pains and diseases of body, those inward racks and horrors which others are pressed withal, and labour under. When any evil or misery is upon us; would we not reckon it a mercy to be rescued and delivered from it? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it? Does not that man owe more to his physician, who prevents his sickness and distemper, than he who, after the weakness and languishing, the pains and tortures of several months, is at length cured by him?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the patience of God, which consists in the deferring or moderating of our deserved punishment. Hence it is, that "slow to anger," and "of great mercy," do so often go together. But this I shall speak to hereafter in some particular discourses.

III. Comforting mercy. (2 Cor. i. 3.) "The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." The Scripture represents God as very merciful, in comforting and supporting those that are afflicted and cast down: hence are those expressions of "putting his arms under us; bearing us up; speaking comfortably; visiting us with his loving-kindness:"



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which signify God's merciful regard to those who are in misery and distress.

IV. His relieving mercy, in supplying those that are in want, and delivering those that are in trouble. God doth, many times, exercise men with trouble and afflictions, with a very gracious and merciful design, to prevent greater evils, which men would otherwise bring upon themselves. Afflictions are a merciful invention of heaven to do us that good, which nothing else can; they awaken us to a sense of God, and of ourselves, to a consideration of the evil of our ways; they make us to take notice of God, to seek him, and inquire after him. God doth, as it were, by afflictions, throw men upon their backs, to make them look up to heaven. (Hos. v. 15.) "In their affliction they will seek me early." (Psal. lxxviii. 34.) "When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God." But God does not delight in this; "he "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." When afflictions have accomplished their work, and obtained their end upon us, God is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us; (Isa. liv. 7, 8.) "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy redeemer."

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatness and fulness of God's mercy appears, because our sins are great: (Psal. lxxviii. 38.) "Being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity." And the multitude of God's mercies because our sins are many; (Psal. li. 1.) "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto

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the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." (Exod. xxxiv. 7.) He is said "to pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin." How manifold are his mercies, to forgive all our sins, of what kind soever! The mercy of God to us in pardoning our sins, is matter of astonishment and admiration; (Mic. vii. 18.) "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity!" But especially, if we consider by what means our pardon is procured; by transferring our guilt upon the most innocent person, the Son of God, and making him to bear our iniquities, and to suffer the wrath of God which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of God's mercy appears in this dispensation; this shews the riches of his grace, that he should be at so much cost to purchase our pardon; "Not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of his own Son." (Eph. i. 6, 7.) "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Having dispatched the three particulars I proposed to be spoken to, I shall shew what use we ought to make of this Divine attribute.

Use 1. We ought with thankfulness to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of God to us. Let us view it in all its dimensions; the height, and length, and breadth of it: in all the variety and kinds of it; the preventing mercy of God to many of us. Those miseries that lie upon others, it is mercy to us that we escaped them. It is mercy that spares us: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not." It is mercy that mitigates our punishment, and makes



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it fall below the desert of our sins. It is mercy that comforts and supports us under any of those evils that lie upon us, and that rescues and delivers us from them; which way soever we look, we are encompassed with the mercies of God; they "compass us about on every side; we are crowned with loving-kindness, and tender mercies." It is mercy that feeds us, and clothes us, and that preserves us. But, above all, we should thankfully acknowledge and admire the pardoning mercy of God; (Psal. ciii. 1, 2, 3.) where David does, as it were, muster up the mercies of God, and make a catalogue of them; he sets the pardoning mercy in the front; "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities."

If we look into ourselves, and consider our own temper and disposition, how void of pity and bowels we are, how cruel, and hard-hearted, and insolent, and revengeful; if we look abroad into the world, and see how "full the earth is of the habitations of cruelty," we shall admire the mercy of God more, and think ourselves more beholden to it. How many things must concur to make our hearts tender, and melt our spirits, and stir our bowels, to make us pitiful and compassionate? We seldom pity any, unless they be actually in misery; nor all such neither, unless the misery they lie under be very great; nor then neither, unless the person that suffers be nearly related, and we be some ways concerned in his sufferings; yea, many times not then neither upon a generous account, but as we are some ways obliged by interest and self-love, and a dear regard to ourselves, when we have suffered the

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like ourselves, and have learned to pity others by our own sufferings, or when in danger or probability to be in the like condition ourselves; so many motives and obligations are necessary to awaken and stir up this affection in us. But God is merciful and pitiful to us out of the mere goodness of his nature; for few of these motives and considerations can have any place in him. This affection of pity and tenderness is stirred up in God by the mere presence of the object, without any other inducement. The mercy of God, many times, doth not stay till we be actually miserable, but looks forward a great way, and pities us at a great distance, and prevents our misery. God doth not only pity us in great calamities, but considers those lesser evils that are upon us. God is merciful to us, when we have deserved all the evils that are upon us; and far greater, when we are less than the least of all his mercies, when we deserved all the misery that is upon us, and have with violent hands pulled it upon our own heads, and have been the authors and procurers of it to ourselves. Though God, in respect of his nature, be at an infinite distance from us; yet his mercy is near to us, and he cannot possibly have any self-interest in it. The Divine nature is not liable to want, or injury, or suffering; he is secure of his own happiness and fulness, and can neither wish the enlargement, nor fear the impairment of his estate; he can never stand in need of pity or relief from us, or any other, and yet he pities us.

Now if we consider the vast difference of this affection in God and us, how tender his mercies are, and how sensible his bowels; and yet we who have so many arguments to move us to pity, how hard our hearts are, and how unapt to relent; as if we were

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born of the rock, and were the offspring of the nether mill-stone: sure, when we duly consider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of God!

How cruel are we to creatures below us! with how little remorse can we kill a flea, or tread upon a worm! partly because we are secure that they cannot hurt us, nor revenge themselves upon us; and partly because they are so despicable in our eyes, and so far below us, that they do not fall under the consideration of our pity. Look upward, proud man! and take notice of Him who is above thee: thou didst not make the creatures below thee, as God did; there is but a finite distance between thee and the meanest creatures; but there is an infinite distance between thee and God. Man is a name of dignity, when we compare ourselves with other creatures; but compared to God, we are worms, and not men; yea, we are nothing, yea, less than nothing, and vanity. How great then is the mercy of God, which regards us, who are so far below him, which takes into consideration such inconsiderable nothings as we are! We may say with David, (Psal. viii. 4.) "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" and with Job, (chap. vii. 17.) "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?"

And then, how hard do we find it to forgive those who have injured us! If any one have offended, or provoked us, how hard are we to be reconciled! how mindful of an injury! how do anger and revenge boil within us! how do we upbraid men with their faults! what vile and low submission do we require of them, before we will receive them into favour, and grant them peace! And if we forgive once,

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we think that is much; but if an offence and provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the disciples of our Saviour, after he had so emphatically taught them forgiveness, in the petition of the Lord's Prayer, yet they had very narrow spirits as to this; (Matt. xviii. 21.) Peter comes to him, and asks him, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" he thought that was much: and yet we have great obligations to pardoning and forgiving others, because we are obnoxious to God, and one another: we shall many times stand in need of pardon from God and men; and it may be our own case; and when it is, we are too apt to be very indulgent to ourselves, and conceive good hopes of the mercy of others; we would have our ignorance, and inadvertencies, and mistakes, and all occasions, and temptations, and provocations, considered; and when we have done amiss, upon submission and acknowledgment of our fault, we would be received into favour: but God, who is not at all liable to us, how ready is he to forgive! If we confess our sins to him, he is merciful to forgive: he pardons freely; and such are the condescensions of his mercy, though he be the party offended, yet he offers pardon to us, and beseeches us to be reconciled: if we do but come towards him, he runs to meet us, as in the parable of the prodigal, (Luke xv. 20.) What reason have we then thankfully to acknowledge and admire the mercy of God to us!

Use 2. The great mercy of God to us, should stir up in us shame and sorrow for sin. The judgments of God may break us; but the consideration of God's mercy, should rather melt and dissolve us into tears: (Luke vii. 47.) the woman that washed Christ's feet with her tears, and wiped them with

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her hair, the account that our Saviour gives of the great affection that she expressed to him, was, "she loved much, because much was forgiven her;" and she grieved much, because much was forgiven her.

Especially, we should sorrow for those sins which have been committed by us after God's mercies received. Mercies after sins should touch our hearts, and make us relent: it should grieve us that we should offend and provoke a God so gracious and merciful, so slow to anger, and so ready to forgive: but sin against mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greatest aggravations of sin. And as mercy raises the guilt of our sins, so it should raise our sorrow for them. No consideration is more apt to work upon human nature, than that of kindness; and the greater mercy has been shewed to us, the greater our sins, and the greater cause of sorrow for them; contraries do illustrate, and set off one another; in the great goodness and mercy of God to us, we see the great evil of our sins against him.

Every sin has the nature of rebellion and disobedience; but sins against mercy have ingratitude in them. Whenever we break the laws of God, we rebel against our sovereign; but as we sin against the mercies of God, we injure our benefactor. This makes our sin to be horrid, and astonishing; (Isa. i. 2.) "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." All the mercies of God are aggravations of our sins; (2 Sam. xii. 7, 8, 9.) "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hands of Saul; and I gave

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thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" God reckons up all his mercies, and from them aggravates David's sin; (1 Kings xi. 9.) he takes notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his mercy: and it is the worst temper in the world, not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercy: no greater evidence of a wicked heart, than that the mercies of God have no effect upon it; (Isa. xxvi. 10.) "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness."

Use 3. Let us imitate the merciful nature of God. This branch of God's goodness is very proper for our imitation. The general exhortation of our Saviour, (Matt. v. 48.) "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" is more particularly expressed by St. Luke, (chap. vi. 36.) "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." Men affect to make images, and impossible representations of God; but, as Seneca saith, *Crede Deos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse.* We may draw this image and likeness of God; we may be gracious and merciful as he is. Christ, who was the express image of his Father, his whole life and undertaking was a continued work of mercy; he "went about doing good" to the souls of men, by preaching the gospel to them; and to the bodies of men, in healing all manner of diseases: there is nothing that he recommends more to us, in his gospel, than this spirit and temper; (Matt. v. 7.) "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." How

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many parables doth he use, to set forth the mercy of God to us, with a design to draw us to the imitation of it? The parable of the prodigal; of the good Samaritan; of the servant to whom he forgave ten thousand talents. We should imitate God in this, in being tender and compassionate to those that are in misery.

This is a piece of natural, indispensable religion, to which positive and instituted religion must give way. (Hosea vi. 6.) "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;" which is twice cited and used by our Saviour. (Micah vi. 8.) "He hath shewed thee, O man, what it is that the Lord thy God requires of thee; to do justice, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

This is always one part of the description of a good man, that he is apt to pity the miseries and necessities of others; (Psal. xxxvii. 26.) "He is ever merciful, and lendeth." He is far from cruelty, not only to men, but even to the brute creatures; (Prov. xii. 10.) "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." There is nothing more contrary to the nature of God, than a cruel and savage disposition, not to be affected with the miseries and sufferings of others: how unlike is this to "the Father of mercies, and the God of consolation!" When we can see cruelty exercised, and our bowels not to be stirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked; how unlike is this to God, who is very pitiful, and of tender mercies! but to rejoice at the miseries of others, this is inhuman and barbarous. Hear how God threatens Edom for rejoicing at the miseries of his brother Jacob, (Obad. ver. 10—14.) But to delight to make others miserable, and to aggravate their sufferings; this is devilish, this is the temper of hell, and the very spirit of the destroyer.

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It becomes man, above all other creatures, to be merciful, who hath had such ample and happy experience of God's mercy to him, and doth still continually stand in need of mercy from God. God hath been very merciful to us. Had it not been for the tender mercies of God to us, we had all of us, long since, been miserable. Now as we have received mercy from God, we should shew it to others. The apostle useth this as an argument why we should relieve those that are in misery and want, because we have had such experience of the mercy and love of God to us; (1 John iii. 16, 17.) "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, &c. how dwelleth the love of God in him?" That man hath no sense of the mercy of God abiding upon his heart, that is not merciful to his brother. And it is an argument why we should forgive one another; (Eph. iv. 32.) "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Chap. v. 1.) "Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children." (Col. iii. 12, 13.) "Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

And we continually stand in need of mercy both from God and man. We are liable one to another; and in the change of human affairs, we may be all subject to one another by turns, and stand in need of one another's pity and compassion; and we must expect, that "with what measure we mete to others,

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with the same it shall be measured to us again." To restrain the cruelties, and check the insolences of men, God has so ordered, in his providence, that very often, in this world, men's cruelties "return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates." Bajazet meets with a Tamerlane.

But if men were not thus liable to one another, we all stand in need of mercy from God. If we be merciful to others in suffering, and forgiving them that have injured us, God will be so to us, he will pardon our sins to us: (Prov. xvi. 6.) "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged." (2 Sam. xxii. 26.) "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful." (Prov. xiv. 21.) "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." (Prov. xxi. 21.) "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life." (Matt. vi. 14.) "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." But, on the other hand, if we be malicious and revengeful, and implacable to those that have offended us, and inexorable to those who desire to be received to favour, and cruel to those who lie at our mercy, hard-hearted to them that are in necessity; what can we expect but that the mercy of God will leave us, that he will "forget to be gracious, and shut up in anger his tender mercy." (Matt. vi. 15.) "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." That is a dreadful passage: (St. James ii. 13.) "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy." How angry is the lord with the servant who was so inexorable to his fellow-servant, after he had forgiven him so great a debt, as you find in the parable; (Matt. xviii. 24.) he owed him ten thousand talents,

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and, upon his submission and entreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him all: but no sooner had this favour been done to him by his lord, but, going forth, he meets his fellow-servant, who owed a small, inconsiderable debt, a hundred pence; he lays hands on him and takes him by the throat, and roundly demands payment of him: he falls down at his feet, and useth the same form of supplication that he had used to his lord; but he rejects his request, and puts him in prison. Now what saith the lord to him: (ver. 32—34.) "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due unto him." Now what application doth our Saviour make of this? (Ver. 35.) "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

God's readiness to forgive us should be a powerful motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greatest injuries that we can suffer from men, if we compare them to the sins that we commit against God, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as a hundred pence to ten thousand talents. If we would be like God, we should forgive the greatest injuries; he pardoneth our sins, though they be exceeding great; many injuries, though offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied; for so God doth to us: "He pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin." (Exod. xxxiv. 7.) (Isa. lv. 7.) "He will

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have mercy, he will abundantly pardon." We would not have God only to forgive us seven times, but seventy times seven, as often as we offend him; so should we forgive our brother.

And we should not be backward to this work; God is "ready to forgive us." (Nehem. ix. 17.) And we should do it heartily, not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts; and while we say we forgive, carry on a secret design in our hearts of revenging ourselves when we have opportunity, but we should, "from our hearts, forgive every one;" for so God doth to us, who, when he forgives us, "casts our iniquities behind his back, and throws them into the bottom of the sea, and blots out our transgression, so as to remember our iniquity no more."

If we do not thus, every time we put up the petition to God, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a prayer, but a dreadful imprecation against ourselves; we pronounce the sentence of our own condemnation, and importune God not to forgive us.

Use 4. If the mercy of God be so great, this may comfort us against despair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they consider their unworthiness, the nature and number of their sins, and the many heavy aggravations of them; they are apt to say with Cain, that "their sin is greater than can be forgiven." But do not look only upon thy sins, but upon the mercies of God. Thou canst not be too sensible of the evil of sin, and of the desert of it; but whilst we aggravate our sins, we must not lessen the mercies of God. When we consider the multitude of our

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sins, we must consider also the multitude of God's tender mercies: we have been great sinners, and God is of great mercy; we have multiplied our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon.

Do but thou put thyself in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy sins, and forsaking of them, and thou hast no reason to doubt but the mercy of God will receive thee: "If we confess our sins, he is merciful and faithful to forgive them." If we had offended man, as we have done God, we might despair of pardon; but it is God, and not man, that we have to deal with; and "his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts."

We cannot be more injurious to God than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and, when we have provoked him, he were not to be appeased and reconciled to us. We disparage the goodness and truth of God, when we distrust those gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodness; if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compassionate sinners, and really desire their happiness. Doth not he condescend so low as to represent himself afflicted for the miseries of men, and to rejoice in the conversion of a sinner? And shall not we believe that he is in good earnest? Doth Christ weep over impenitent sinners, because "they will not know the things of their peace?" and canst thou think he will not pardon thee upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that men will undo themselves, and will not be saved? and canst thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot honour and glorify God

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more, than by entertaining great thoughts of his mercy. As we are said to glorify God by our repentance, because thereby we acknowledge God's holiness and justice, so we glorify him by believing his mercy, because we conceive a right opinion of his goodness and truth; we set to our seal, that God is merciful and true: (Psal. cxlvii. 11.) it is said, that "God takes pleasure in them that hope in his mercy." As he delights in mercy, so in our acknowledgments of it; that sinners should conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou dost submit to the terms of God's mercy, thou hast no reason to despair of it: and he that thinks that his sins are more or greater than the mercy of God can pardon, must think that there may be more evil in the creature than there is goodness in God.

Use 5. By way of caution against the presumptuous sinner. If there be any that trespass upon the goodness of God, and presume to encourage themselves in sin, upon the hopes of his mercy; let such know that God is just, as well as merciful. A God of all mercy is an idol, such a God as men set up in their own imaginations, but not the true God whom the Scriptures describe: to such persons the Scripture describes him after another manner: (Nahum i. 2.) "God is jealous; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies." If any man abuse the mercy of God, to "the strengthening of himself in his own wickedness, and bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, and add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord

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and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven." (Deut. xxix. 19, 20.)

Though it be the nature of God to be merciful, yet the exercise of his mercy is regulated by his wisdom; he will not be merciful to those that despise his mercy, to those that abuse it, to those that are resolved to go on in their sins to tempt his mercy, and make bold to say, "Let us sin that grace may abound." God designs his mercy for those that are prepared to receive it; (Isa. lv. 7.) "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The mercy of God is an enemy to sin, as well as his justice; and it is no where offered to countenance sin, but to convert the sinner; and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. God hath no where said that he will be merciful to those who, upon the score of his mercy, are bold with him, and presume to offend him; but "the mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him, and keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them." There is forgiveness with him, "that he may be feared," but not that he may be despised and affronted. This is to contradict the very end of God's mercy, which is, to "lead us to repentance," to engage us to leave our sins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed, then, of abusing the mercy of God: we cannot provoke the justice of God more, than by presuming upon his mercy. This is the time of God's mercy; use this opportunity: if thou neglectest it, a day of justice and vengeance is coming;



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(Rom. ii. 4, 5.) "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance? and treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God?" Now is the manifestation of God's mercy; but there is a time a coming, when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed against those who abuse his mercy, "not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance." To think that the goodness of God was intended for any other end than to take us off from sin, is a gross and affected ignorance that will ruin us; and they who draw any conclusion from the mercy of God, which may harden them in their sins, they are such as the prophet speaks of; (Isa. xxvii. 11.) "A people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not save them; and he that formed them will shew them no favour." Mercy itself will rejoice in the ruin of those that abuse it, and it will aggravate their condemnation. There is no person towards whom God will be more severely just, than towards such. The justice of God, exasperated and set on by his injured and abused mercy, like a razor set in oil, will have the keener edge, and be the sharper for its smoothness. Those that have made the mercy of God their enemy, must expect the worst his justice can do unto them.

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# SERMON CXLVIII.

## THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*—2 PET. iii. 9.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the apostle puts the Christians, to whom he writes, in mind of the predictions of the ancient prophets, and of the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, concerning the general judgment of the world, which by many (and, perhaps, by the apostles themselves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would presently follow the destruction of Jerusalem; but he tells them, that before that, there would arise a certain sect, or sort of men, that would deride the expectation of a future judgment, designing, probably, the Carpocratians (a branch of that large sect of the Gnostics), of whom St. Austin expressly says, "That they denied the resurrection, and, consequently, a future judgment." These St. Peter calls scoffers, (ver. 3, 4.) "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" The word is ἐπαγγελία, which signifies a declaration in general, whether it be by way of promise or threatening. What is become of that declaration of Christ, so frequently repeated in the gospel, concerning his coming to judgment? "For



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since the fathers fell asleep," or, saving that the fathers are fallen asleep, except only that men die, and one generation succeeds another, " all things continue as they were from the creation of the world;" that is, the world continues still as it was from the beginning, and there is no sign of any such change and alteration as is foretold. To this he answers two things:

1. That these scoffers, though they took themselves to be wits, did betray great ignorance, both of the condition of the world, and of the nature of God: they talked very ignorantly concerning the world, when they said, " all things continued as they were from the creation of it," when so remarkable a change had already happened, as the destruction of it by water; and therefore, the prediction concerning the destruction of it by fire, before the great and terrible day of judgment, was no ways incredible. And they shewed themselves, likewise, very ignorant of the perfection of the Divine nature; to which, being eternally the same, a thousand years and one day are all one: and if God make good his word some thousands of years hence, it will make no sensible difference concerning his eternal duration; it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end; (ver. 8.) " Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This, it seems, was a common saying among the Jews, to signify, that to the eternity of God, no finite duration bears any proportion; and therefore, with regard to eternity, it is all one whether it be a thousand years, or one day. The Psalmist hath an expression much to the same purpose; (Psal. xc. 4.)

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" For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night." And the son of Sirach likewise, (Ecclus. xviii. 10.) " As a drop of water to the sea, and as a grain of sand to the sea-shore, so are a thousand years to the days of eternity."

The like expression we meet with in heathen writers; " To the gods no time is long," saith Pythagoras: and Plutarch, " The whole space of a man's life, to the gods, is as nothing." And in his excellent discourse of the slowness of the Divine vengeance (the very argument St. Peter is here upon), he hath this passage, " that a thousand, or ten thousand years, are but as an indivisible point to an infinite duration." And therefore, when the judgment is to be eternal, the delay of it, though it were for a thousand years, is an objection of no force, against either the certainty, or the terror of it; for, to eternity, all time is equally short; and it matters not when the punishment of sinners begins, if it shall never have an end.

2. But because the distance between the declaration of a future judgment, and the coming of it, though it be nothing to God, yet it seemed long to them; therefore he gives such an account of it, as doth not in the least impeach the truth and faithfulness of God, but is a clear argument and demonstration of his goodness. Admitting what they said to be true, that God delays judgment for a great while, yet this gives no ground to conclude that judgment will never be; but it shews the great goodness of God to sinners, that he gives them so long a space of repentance, that so they may prevent the terror of that day, whenever it comes, and escape that dreadful ruin, which will certainly over-

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take, sooner or later, all impenitent sinners: "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise," that is, as to the declaration which he hath made of a future judgment, "as some men count slackness;" that is, as if the delay of judgment were an argument it would never come. This is a false inference from the delay of punishment, and an ill interpretation of the goodness of God to sinners, who bears long with them, and delays judgment, on purpose to give men time to repent, and, by repentance, to prevent their own eternal ruin: "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In the handling of these words, I shall do these three things:

First, I shall consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the Divine nature; "God is long-suffering to us-ward."

Secondly, I shall shew that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity, as the scoffers, here foretold by the apostle, argued, that because our Lord delayeth his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come; "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness."

Thirdly, I will consider the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering towards mankind, which the apostle here gives; "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

First, I will consider the patience and long-suffering of God towards mankind, as it is an attribute

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and perfection of the Divine nature; "God is long-suffering to us-ward." In the handling of this, I shall do these three things:

I. I shall shew what is meant by the patience and long-suffering of God.

II. That this is a perfection of the Divine nature.

III. I shall give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind.

I. What is meant by the patience and long-suffering of God.

The Hebrew word signifies, one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the New Testament it is sometimes expressed by the word ὑπομονὴ, which signifies God's forbearance, and patient waiting for our repentance; sometimes by the word ἀνοχὴ, which signifies God's holding in his wrath and restraining himself from punishing; and sometimes by μακροθυμία, which signifies the extent of his patience, his long-suffering, and forbearing for a long time the punishment due to sinners.

So that the patience of God is his goodness to sinners, in deferring or moderating the punishment due to them for their sins: the deferring of deserved punishment in whole, or in part, which, if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his long-suffering: and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the punishment due to sin, is an instance likewise of God's patience; and not only the deferring and moderating of temporal punishment, but the adjourning of the eternal misery of sinners, is a principal instance of God's patience; so that the patience of God takes in all that space of repentance which God affords to sinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befal

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sinners in this life, and are short of cutting them off, and turning them into hell, are comprehended in the patience of God. Whenever God punisheth, it is of his great mercy and patience that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not. I proceed to the

II. Second thing I proposed, which was to shew, that patience is a perfection of the Divine nature.

It is not necessarily due to us, but it is due to the perfection of the Divine nature, and essentially belongs to it: it is a principal branch of God's goodness, which is the highest and most glorious perfection of all other; and therefore we always find it in Scripture, in the company of God's milder and sweeter attributes. When God would give the most perfect description of himself, and, as he says to Moses, "make all his glory to pass before us," he usually does it by those attributes which declare his goodness; and patience is always one of them. (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) "The Lord passed by before Moses, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." (Psal. lxxxvi. 15.) "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." (Psal. ciii. 8.) "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." And the same you find, Psal. cxlv. 8. Jonah iv. 2. Joel ii. 13.

Sometimes, indeed, you find a severer attribute added to these, as that "he will by no means clear the guilty," (Exod. xxxiv. 7.) But it is always put in the last place; to declare to us, that God's goodness, and mercy, and patience, are his first and primary perfections: and it is only when these fail,

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and have no effect upon us, but are abused by us, to the encouragement of ourselves in an impenitent course, that his justice takes place.

Nay, even among men, it is esteemed a perfection, to be able to forbear and to restrain our anger; passion is impotency and folly, but patience is power and wisdom. (Prov. xiv. 29.) " He that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly." (Prov. xvi. 32.) " He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." (Rom. xii. 21.) " Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." To be impatient, is to be overcome; but to forbear anger and revenge, is a victory. Patience is an argument of great power and command of ourselves; and therefore God himself, who is the most powerful being, is slow to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the power of God, than his patience; that when he is provoked by such vile and despicable creatures as we are, he can withhold his hand from destroying us. This is the argument which Moses useth, (Numb. xiv. 17, 18.) that the power of God doth so eminently appear in his patience; " And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is gracious, and long-suffering." And yet power, where it is not restrained by wisdom and goodness, is a great temptation to anger; because where there is power, there is something to back it, and make it good: and therefore the Psalmist doth recommend and set off the patience of God, from the consideration of his power; (Psal. vii. 11.) " God is strong and patient; God is provoked every day:" God is strong, and

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therefore patient; or, he is infinitely patient, notwithstanding his almighty power to revenge the daily provocations of his creatures.

Among men, anger and weakness commonly go together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently observed by the son of Sirach: (Ecclus. x. 18.) "Pride was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman." So that anger and impatience is every where unreasonable. Where there is power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for omnipotency: and where there wants power, anger is above it; it is too much for a weak and impotent creature to be angry. Where there is power, anger is needless, and of no use; and where there is no power, it is vain and to no purpose. So that patience is every where a perfection, both to God and man. I proceed to the

III. Third thing I proposed, which was, to give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we consider these two things:

1. How men deal with God.

2. How, notwithstanding this, God deals with them.

1. How men deal with God. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we grieve and weary him with our iniquities, as the expression is in the prophet: (Isa. xliii. 24.) "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." Every sin that we commit is an affront to the Divine Majesty, and a contempt of his authority: by denying submission to his laws, we question his omnipresence, and say, "Doth God see? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" Or if we acknowledge his omnipresence, and that he

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regards what we do, the provocation is still the greater; because then we affront him to his face; we dare his justice, and challenge his omnipotency, and "provoke the Lord to jealousy," as if "we were stronger than he."

Is not God patient, when the whole world lies in wickedness, and the earth is overspread with violence, and is full of the habitations of cruelty? when he, who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and is so highly offended at the sins of men, hath yet the patience to look upon "them that deal treacherously, and to hold his peace?" when the "wicked persecutes and devours the man that is more righteous than he?" when even that part of the world which professeth the name of God and Christ, do, by their vile and abominable lives, "blaspheme that holy and glorious name whereby they are called."

Every moment God hath greater injuries done to him, and more affronts put upon him, than were ever offered to all the sons of men; and, surely, provocations are trials of patience, especially when they are so numerous, and so heinous; for if offences rise according to the dignity of the person injured, and the meanness of him that doth the injury, then no offences are so great as those that are committed by men against God, no affronts like to those which are offered to the Divine Majesty by the continual provocations of his creatures. And is not this an argument of God's patience, that the glorious Majesty of heaven should bear such multiplied indignities from such vile worms? that he who is the Former of all things, should endure his own creatures to rebel against him, and the work of his hands to strike at him? that he who is our great Benefactor, should

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put up such affronts from those who depend upon his bounty, and are maintained at his charge? that he, "in whose hands our breath is," should suffer men to breathe out oaths, and curses, and blasphemies against him? Surely, these prove the patience of God to purpose, and are equally trials and arguments of it.

2. The patience of God will farther appear, if we consider how, notwithstanding all this, God deals with us. He is patient to the whole world, in that he doth not turn us out of being, and "turn the wicked" together "into hell, with all the nations that forget God." He is patient to the greatest part of mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible examples of his justice, "that others may hear and fear," and take warning by them. He is patient to particular persons, in that, notwithstanding our daily provocations, he "prevents us daily with the blessing" of his goodness, prolonging our lives and vouchsafing so many favours to us, that, "by this great goodness, we may be led to repentance."

But the patience of God will more illustriously appear, if we consider these following particulars, which are so many evidences and instances of it.

1. That God is not obliged to spare and forbear us at all. It is patience, that he doth not surprise us in the very act of sin, and let fly at us with a thunderbolt so soon as ever we have offended; that the wrath of God doth not fall upon the intemperate person, as it did upon the Israelites, "while the meat and drink is yet in their mouths;" that a man is not struck dead or mad whilst he is telling a lie; that the soul of the profane and false-swearer does not expire with his oaths and perjuries.

2. That God spares us, when it is in his power so

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easily to ruin us; when he can with one word command us out of being, and by cutting asunder one little thread, let us drop into hell. If God were disposed to severity, he could deal with us after another manner, and, as the expression is in the prophet, "ease himself of his adversaries, and be avenged of his enemies."

3. That God exerciseth this patience to sinners, *flagrante bello*, while they are up in arms against him, and committing hostilities upon him; he bears with us even when we are challenging his justice to punish us, and provoking his power to destroy us.

4. That he is so very slow and unwilling to punish and to inflict his judgments upon us. As for eternal punishments, God defers them a long while, and by all proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for those temporal judgments which God inflicts upon sinners, he carries himself so, that we may plainly see all the signs of unwillingness that can be; he tries to prevent them; he is loath to set about this work; and when he does, it is with much reluctance; and then he is easily persuaded and prevailed withal not to do it; and when he does, he does it not rigorously, and to extremity; and he is soon taken off, after he is engaged in it: all which are great instances and evidences of his wonderful patience to sinners.

(1.) God's unwillingness to punish, appears in that he labours to prevent punishment; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent sin, the meritorious cause of God's judgments: to this end, he hath threatened it with severe punishments, that the dread of them may make us afraid

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to offend; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us a space of repentance, and invites us earnestly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his judgments; he expostulates with sinners, and reasons the case with them, as if he were more concerned not to punish, than they are not to be punished: and thus, by his earnest desire of our repentance, he shews how little he desires our ruin.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work. Judgment is, in Scripture, called "his strange work;" as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the sudden. He is represented as not prepared for such a work; (Deut. xxxii. 41.) "If I whet my glittering sword;" as if the instruments of punishment were not ready for us. Nay, by a strange kind of condescension to our capacities, and to set forth to us the patience of God, and his slowness to wrath, after the manner of men, he is represented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to destroy us; (Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3.) where he tells Moses, that he would send an angel before them; "For I will not go up in the midst of thee, lest I consume thee in the way."

At works of mercy he is very ready and forward. When Daniel prayed for the deliverance of the people of Israel out of captivity, the angel tells him, that "at the beginning of his supplication, the commandment came forth," to bring him a promise of their deliverance. The mercy of God, many times, prevents our prayers, and outruns our wishes and desires: but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it; he passeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that, by our repentance, he will prevent his judgments: "He hearkened and heard, (saith God in the prophet Jeremiah) but they

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spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" He is represented as waiting and listening, to hear if any penitent word should drop from them; he gives the sinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to consider what he hath done, and space to reason himself into repentance. For this reason the judgments of God do often follow the sins of men at a great distance; otherwise he could easily make them mend their pace, and "consume us in a moment."

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance: (Hosea xi. 8.) "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim; how shall I deliver thee, Israel? Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together." He is represented as making many essays and offers before he came to it: (Psal. cvi. 26.) "Many a time lifted he up his hand in the wilderness to destroy them." He made as if he would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be so severe. God withholds his judgments till he is weary of holding in, as the expression is, (Jer. vi. 11.) until he can forbear no longer; (Jer. xliv. 22.) "So that the Lord could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed."

(4.) God is easily prevailed upon not to punish. When he seemed resolved upon it to destroy the murmuring of the Israelites, yet how often, at the intercession of Moses, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to spare a very wicked people, appears by the instance of Sodom, where, if there had been but "ten righteous persons," he would not have destroyed them for the ten's

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sake. Yea, when his truth seemed to have been pawned (at least in the apprehension of his prophet), yet even then repentance took him off, as in the case of Nineveh. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! With what joy does he tell the prophet the news of Ahab's humiliation! "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself? Because he humbleth himself, I will not bring the evil in his days."

(5.) When he punisheth, he does it very seldom rigorously, and to extremity, not so much as we deserve; (Psal. ciii. 10.) "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Nor so much as he can, he doth not let loose the fierceness of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath; (Psal. lxxviii. 38.) "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

(6.) After he hath begun to punish, and is engaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous instance of this, 2 Sam. xxiv. when God had sent three days' pestilence upon Israel, for David's sin in numbering the people, and, at the end of the third day, the angel of the Lord had stretched forth his hand over Jerusalem, to destroy it; upon the prayer of David, it is said, that the "Lord repented of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough; stay now thine hand." Nay, so ready is God to be taken off from this work, that he sets a high value upon those who stand in the gap to turn away his wrath; (Numb. xxv. 11—13.) "Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel (while he was zealous for my sake among them), that I consumed not the children

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of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel." That which God values in this action of Phinehas, next to his zeal for him, is, that "he turned away his wrath, and made an atonement for the children of Israel."

5. And lastly, The patience of God will yet appear with farther advantage, if we consider some eminent and remarkable instances of it; which are so much the more considerable, because they are instances not only of God's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many persons; the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah upon the whole world, as is probably conjectured, for the space of a hundred and twenty years. God bore with the people of Israel in the wilderness, after they had tempted him ten times, for the space of forty years; (Acts xiii. 18.) "And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness." And this instance of God's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want flesh or water, they were out of patience with God; when Moses was in the mount with God but forty days, they presently fall to make new gods; they had not the patience of forty days, and yet God bore their manners forty years. God had spared Nineveh for some ages; and when his patience was even expired, and he seems to have passed a final sentence upon it, yet he grants a reprieve for forty days, that they might sue out their pardon in that time: and they did so; "They turned from their evil ways,



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and God turned from the evil he said he would do them, and he did it not."

But the most remarkable instance of God's long-suffering is to the Jews, if we consider it with all the circumstances of it; after they had rejected the Son of God, notwithstanding the purity of his doctrine, and the power of his miracles; after they had unjustly condemned, and cruelly murdered, the Lord of life, yet the patience of God respited the ruin of that people forty years.

Besides all these, there are many instances of God's patience to particular persons: but it were endless to enumerate these; every one of us may be an instance to ourselves of God's long-suffering.

I shall only add, as a farther advantage to set off the patience of God to sinners, that his forbearance is so great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own servants. Job, who was so patient a man himself, thought much at it; (Job xxi. 7, 8.) "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes." Jonah challengeth God for it; (chap. iv. 2.) "Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger," &c. Jonah had observed God to be so prone to this, that he was loath to be sent upon his message, lest God should discredit his prophet, in not being so good (shall I say, so severe) as his word.

I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to; viz. The great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind.

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# SERMON CXLIX.

## THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*—2 PET. iii. 9.

I HAVE made entrance into these words; in the handling of which, I proposed to do these three things:

First, To consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the Divine nature; "God is long-suffering to us-ward."

Secondly, To shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of his judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity; "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness."

Thirdly, To consider the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering towards mankind; "He is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." I have already spoken to the

First of these; namely, The patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the Divine nature. I proceed now to the

Second thing I proposed; namely, To shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity; "God is not slack concerning his promise,



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as some men count slackness;" that is, as the scoffers, here mentioned by the apostle, did ignorantly and maliciously reason, that because our Lord delayed his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come.

There was, indeed, some pretence for this objection; because the Christians did generally apprehend that the day of judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem; and it seems, the disciples themselves were of that persuasion before our Saviour's death; when our Saviour discoursing to them of the destruction of the temple, they put these two questions to him: (Matt. xxiv. 3.) "And as he sate upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" "When shall these things be?" that is, the things he had been speaking of immediately before, viz. the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dissolution of the temple; that is plainly the meaning of the first question; to which they subjoined another, "and what shall be the sign of thy coming?" that is, to judgment, "and of the end of the world?" which, in all probability, was added to the former, because they supposed that the one was presently to follow the other, and therefore the same answer would serve them both: and it appears by our Saviour's answer, that he was not concerned to rectify them in this mistake, which might be of good use to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the gospel, since there was like to be so little time for it; and likewise to wean their affections from this world, which they thought to be so near an end.

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One thing, indeed, our Saviour says, which (had they not been prepossessed with another opinion) does sufficiently intimate, that there might be a considerable space of time betwixt the destruction of Jerusalem and the day of judgment; and this we find only in St. Luke, (chap. xxi. 24.) where, speaking of the miseries and calamities that should come upon the Jews, he says, "They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be carried into captivity into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gentiles, until the time of the gentiles be fulfilled." So that here were a great many events foretold, betwixt the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, the accomplishment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the event of things; Jerusalem being at this day still "trodden down by the gentiles," and the Jews still continuing "dispersed over the world:" but the disciples, it seems, did not much mind this, being carried away with a prejudicate conceit, that the end of the world would happen before the end of that age; in which they were much confirmed by what our Saviour, after his resurrection, said of St. John, upon occasion of Peter's question concerning him, (John xxi. 21, 22.) "Lord, what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Upon which words of our Saviour concerning him, St. John himself adds, (ver. 23.) "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, That that disciple should not die;" that is, that he should live till the coming of our Lord, and then be taken up with him into heaven: from all which, they probably (as they thought) concluded, that the day of judgment would happen before the end of that age, whilst St. John was alive: but St. John, who writ last of the

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evangelists (as Eusebius tells us), and lived until after the destruction of Jerusalem, as he acquaints us with this mistake, which was current among the Christians, so he takes care to rectify it, telling us, that "Jesus said not, He should not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" He tells us, that our Saviour did not affirm that "He should not die;" but, to repress St. Peter's curiosity, he says, "If it were my pleasure that he should not die at all, but live till I come to judgment, what is that to thee?" And St. Peter, likewise (or whoever was the author of this Second Epistle, or, at least, of this third chapter, which seems to be a new epistle by itself), takes notice of this mistake, about the nearness of the day of judgment, as that which gave occasion to these scoffers to deride the expectation of a future judgment among the Christians, because they had been already deceived about the time of it; and this the scoffers twitted them with in that question, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Therefore, the learned Grotius conjectures very probably, that this last epistle (contained in the third chapter) was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the time fixed for Christ's coming to judgment; and, therefore, there could be no ground for this scoff until after that time. St. Peter, indeed, did not live so long; and therefore Grotius thinks, that this epistle was writ by Simeon, or Simon, who was successor of St. James in the bishopric of Jerusalem, and lived to the time of Trajan.

I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might understand where the ground and force of this scoff lay; namely, in this, that because the Christians had generally been very confident, that the coming of Christ to judgment would

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be presently after the destruction of Jerusalem, and were now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future judgment; because they might be deceived in that as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very falsely: because our Saviour had positively and peremptorily foretold his coming to judgment, but had never fixed and determined the time of it: nay, so far was he from that, that he had plainly told his disciples, that the precise time of the day of judgment God had reserved as a secret to himself, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the angels in heaven, nor to the Son himself; (Mark xiii. 32, 33.) "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father; take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is." So that if they presumed to make any conjectures about the time when the day of judgment would be, they did it without any warrant from our Lord: it was great presumption in them to determine the time of it, when our Saviour had so expressly told them, that the Father had reserved this as a secret, which he had never communicated to any; and, therefore, if they were mistaken about it, it was no wonder. But their mistake in this, was no prejudice to the truth of our Saviour's clear prediction of a future judgment, without any determination of the time of it, for that might be at some thousands of years distance, and yet be certain for all that; and the delay of it, was no sign of the uncertainty of our Saviour's prediction concerning it, but only of God's great patience and long-suffering to sinners, in expectation of their repentance; "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some

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men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward." And this brings me to the

Third and last particular in the text; namely, The true reason of God's patience and long-suffering to mankind: "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." And for this, St. Peter cites St. Paul: (ver. 15, of this chapter.) "And account that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation;" that is, that the great end and design of God's goodness and long-suffering to sinners, is, that they may repent and be saved: "Account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you." Now these words are not expressly found in St. Paul's writings: but the sense and effect of them is, (viz. in Rom. ii. 4.) "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" God hath a very gracious and merciful design in his patience to sinners: he is good, that he may make us so, and that his "goodness may lead us to repentance:" he defers punishment on purpose, that he may give men time to bethink themselves, and to return to a better mind; "He winks at the sins of men, that they may repent," says the son of Sirach. The patience of God aims at the cure and recovery of those who are not desperately and resolutely wicked.

This is the primary end and intention of God's patience to sinners; and if he fail of this end, through our hardness and impenitency, he hath other ends, which he will infallibly attain: he will hereby glorify the riches of his mercy, and vindi-

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cate the righteousness of his justice; the damned in hell shall acknowledge, that the patience of God was great mercy and goodness to them, though they abused it; for God does not lose the glory of his patience, though we lose the benefit of it, and he will make it subservient to his justice, one way or other. Those great offenders whom he spares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he, many times, makes use of, as instruments for the punishing of others, "as rods of his wrath, for the discipline of the world;" and he often reserves those who are incorrigibly bad, for a more remarkable ruin: but, however, they are reserved to the judgment of the great day; and if, after God hath exercised much patience towards sinners in this world, he inflicts punishment on them in the next, it must be acknowledged to be most just: for what can he do less, than to condemn those who would not be saved, and to make them miserable who so obstinately refused to be happy?

Before I come to apply this discourse concerning the patience and long-suffering of God to sinners, I must remove an objection or two:

I. The severity of God to some sinners in this life, and to all impenitent sinners in the next, seems to contradict what hath been said concerning God's patience and long-suffering.

As for the severity of God towards impenitent sinners in the next life, this doth not at all contradict the patience of God; because the very nature of patience, and forbearance, and long-suffering, does suppose a determinate time, and that they will not last always: this life is the day of God's patience, and in the next world his justice and severity will take place. And, therefore, the punish-

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ment of sinners in another world, after God hath tried them in this, and expected their repentance, is no ways contrary to his patience and goodness, and very agreeable to his wisdom and justice; for it is no part of goodness to see itself perpetually abused; it is not patience, but stupidity and insensibleness, to endure to be always trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and just laws for ever despised and contemned.

And as for his severity to some sinners in this life—as to Lot's wife; to the Israelite that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day; to Nadab and Abihu; to Uzzah; to Ananias and Sapphira; and to Herod Agrippa—in all which instances God seems to have made quick work, and to have executed judgment speedily. To these I answer, that this severity of God to some few, doth rather magnify his patience to the rest of mankind; he may be severe to some few for example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better use of his patience, and not to trespass so boldly upon it; and, perhaps, he hath exercised much patience already towards those to whom at last he is so severe, as is plain in the case of Herod, and it may well be supposed in most of the other instances; or else the sin, so suddenly and severely punished, was very heinous and presumptuous, of a contagious and spreading nature, and of dangerous example. Lot's wife sinned most presumptuously against an express and an easy command, and whilst God was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of Nadab and Abihu, and of the man that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day, were presently after the giving of the law, in which case great severity is necessary; and that of Ananias and Sapphira, at

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the first publishing of the gospel, that the majesty of the Divine Spirit, and the authority of the first publishers of it, might not be contemned: that of Uzzah was upon the return of the ark of God from among the Philistines, that the people might not lose their reverence for it after it had been taken captive. So that these necessary severities to a few, in comparison of those many that are warned by them, are rather arguments of God's patience than objections against it.

II. It is objected, That if God do not desire the ruin of sinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to pass that all are not brought to repentance? for who hath resisted his will? To this I answer:

1. That there is no doubt but God is able to do this: he can, if he pleaseth, conquer and reclaim the most obstinate spirits; he is able out of "stones to raise up children unto Abraham:" and sometimes he exerts his omnipotence herein, as in the conversion of St. Paul, in a kind of violent and irresistible manner: but he hath no where declared that he will do this to all, and we see plainly, in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be said, "not to be willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," when he does, on his part, what is sufficient to that end; and upon this ground the Scripture every where represents God as desiring the repentance of sinners, and their obedience to his laws: (Deut. v. 29.) "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them!" So Jer. xiii. 27. "O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" (Isa. v. 3, 4.) We find God there solemnly appeal-

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ing to the people of Israel, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done to it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" God may justly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience from those to whom he affords a sufficiency of means to that end. And if so, then,

3. The true reason why men do not repent, but perish, is because they are obstinate, and will not repent; and this account the Scripture every where gives of the impenitency of men, and the ruin consequent upon it: (Psal. lxxxi. 13.) "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me." (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Prov. i. 29—31.) "That they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices." The ruin of sinners doth not proceed from the counsel of God, but from their own choice. And so likewise our Saviour every where chargeth the ruin and destruction of the Jews upon their own wilful obstinacy.

The inferences from this discourse concerning the patience and long-suffering of God towards mankind, shall be these three:

1. To stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great patience of God towards us, notwithstand-

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ing our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to ourselves those words: (Lam. iii. 22.) "It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." They are "renewed every morning." Whenever we sin, (and "we provoke God every day") it is of his "patience that we are not destroyed:" and when we sin again, this is a new and greater instance of God's patience. The mercies of God's patience are no more to be numbered than our sins: we may say with David, "How great is the sum of them?" The goodness of God in sparing us is, in some respect, greater than his goodness in creating us; because he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to destroy us.

II. Let us propound the patience of God, for a pattern to ourselves. Plutarch says, "That God sets forth himself in the midst of the world for our imitation, and propounds to us the example of his patience, to teach us not to revenge injuries hastily upon one another."

III. Let us comply with the design of God's patience and long-suffering towards us, which is "to bring us to repentance." Men are very apt to abuse it to a quite contrary purpose, to the encouraging themselves in their evil ways. So Solomon observes: (Eccl. viii. 11.) "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But this is very false reasoning; for the patience of God is an enemy to sin, as well as his justice; and the design of it is not to countenance sin, but to convert the sinner: (Rom. ii. 4.) "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the

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goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Patience in God should produce repentance in us; and we should look upon it as an opportunity given us by God to repent and be saved: (2 Pet. iii. 15.) "Account that the long-suffering of God is salvation." They that do not improve the patience of God to their own salvation, mistake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are so far from making this use of it, that they presume upon it, and sin with more courage and confidence because of it; but that we may be sensible of the danger of this, I will offer these two or three considerations:

1. That nothing is more provoking to God than the abuse of his patience. God's patience waits for our repentance; and all long attendance, even of inferiors upon their superiors, hath something in it that is grievous: how much more grievous and provoking must it be to the great God, after he hath laid out upon us all the riches of his goodness and long-suffering, to have that despised! after his patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thrust away with contempt, but to have that which should be an argument to us to leave our sins, abused into an encouragement to continue in them! God takes an account of all the days of his patience and forbearance: (Luke xiii. 7.) "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

2. Consider that the patience of God will have an end. Though God suffers long, he will not suffer always; we may provoke God so long, until he can forbear no longer without injury and dishonour to his wisdom, and justice, and holiness; and God will not suffer one attribute to wrong the rest: his

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wisdom will determine the length of his patience; and when his patience is to no purpose, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his wisdom will then put a period to it; then the patience of his mercy will determine. "How often would I have gathered you, and you would not? therefore your house is left unto you desolate." And the patience of God's judgments will then determine. "Why should they be smitten any more? they will revolt more and more." Yea, patience itself, after a long and fruitless expectation, will expire. A sinner may continue so long impenitent, till the patience of God, as I may say, grows impenitent, and then our ruin will make haste, and destruction "will come upon us in a moment." If men will not come to repentance, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," as it follows in the next verse after the text; the judgment of God will suddenly surprise those who will not be gained by his patience.

3. Consider that nothing will more hasten and aggravate our ruin than the abuse of God's patience. All this time of God's patience his wrath is coming towards us; and the more we presume upon it, the sooner it will overtake us: (Luke xii. 45, 46.) the wicked servant, who said his "lord delayed his coming," and fell to rioting and drunkenness; our Saviour tells us, that "the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him."

And it will aggravate our ruin; the longer punishment is a coming, the heavier it will be: those things which are long in preparation are terrible in execution; the weight of God's wrath will make amends for the slowness of it; and the delay of judgment will be fully recompensed in the dread-

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fulness of it when it comes. Let all those consider this who go on in their sin, and are deaf to the voice of God's patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of vengeance a coming upon those who trifle away this day of God's patience: nothing will sooner and more inflame the wrath and displeasure of God against us than his abused patience, and the despised riches of his goodness. As oil, though it be soft and smooth, yet, when it is once inflamed, burns most fiercely; so the patience of God, when it is abused, turns into fury; and his mildest attributes into the greatest severities.

And if the patience of God do not bring us to repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin: after God hath kept a long indignation in his breast, it will, at length, break forth with the greater violence. The patience of God increaseth his judgments by an incredible kind of proportion; (Levit. xxvi. 18.) "And if you will still (says God to the people of Israel) walk contrary to me, and if ye will not be reformed by all these things, I will punish you yet seven times more." And, (verse 28.) "I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, according to your sins." At first God's justice accuseth sinners; but, after a long time of patience, his mercy comes in against us, and, instead of staying his hand, adds weight to his blows; (Rom. ix. 22.) "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" They upon whom the patience of God hath no good effect, are "vessels of wrath, prepared and fitted for destruction." If ever God display his wrath, and make his anger known, he will do it in the

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most severe manner upon those who have despised and abused his patience; for these, in a more peculiar manner, "do treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

To conclude: Let us all take a review of our lives, and consider how long the patience of God hath waited upon us, and borne with us; with some twenty, forty, perhaps sixty years, and longer. Do we not remember how God spared us in such a danger, when we gave ourselves for lost? and how he recovered us in such a sickness, when the physician gave us up for gone? and what use have we made of this patience and long-suffering of God towards us? It is the worst temper in the world not to be melted by kindness, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle usage. He that is not wrought upon, neither by the patience of his mercy, nor by the patience of his judgments, his case is desperate, and past remedy. "Consider this, all ye that forget God," lest his patience turn into fury; for "God is not slack, as some men count slackness; but long-suffering to sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."



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# SERMON CL.

## THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*—ECCLES. viii. 11.

NOTHING is more evident, than that "the world lies in wickedness," and that iniquity every where abounds; and yet nothing is more certain, than that "God will not acquit the guilty," and let sin go unpunished. All men, excepting those who have offered notorious violence to the light of their own minds, and "have put the candle of the Lord," which is in them, "under a bushel," do believe that there is a God in the world, to whose holy nature and will sin is perfectly contrary, "who loves righteousness, and hates iniquity;" that "his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings;" that "there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." All men, except those whose consciences are seared, as it were, with a hot iron, are convinced of the difference of good and evil, and that it is not all one, whether men serve God or serve him not, do well or live wickedly. Every man, from his inward sense and experience, is satisfied of his own liberty, and that God lays upon men no necessity of sinning, but that whenever we do amiss, it is our own act, and we choose to do so; and so far is he from giving the least countenance to sin, that he hath given all imaginable discouragement to

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it, by the most severe and terrible threatenings, such as one would think sufficient to deter men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the world; and to make his threatenings the more awful and effectual, his providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable instances of his justice and severity upon notorious offenders, even in this life: and yet, for all this, men do, and will sin; nay, they are zealously set and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives sinners such heart, and makes them so resolute and undaunted in so dangerous a course. Solomon gives us this account of it; because the punishments and judgments of God follow the sins of men so slowly, and are long before they overtake the sinner; "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil."

The scope of the wise man's discourse is this; that, by reason of God's forbearance and long-suffering towards sinners in this life, it is not so easy to discern the difference between them and other men; this life is the day of God's patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompence. Now because God doth defer and moderate the punishment of sinners in this world, and reserve the weight of his judgments to the next; because, through the long-suffering of God, many great sinners live and die without any remarkable testimony of God's wrath and displeasure against them; "therefore the heart of the children of men are fully set in them to do evil."

If we render the text word for word from the origianl, it runs thus; "Because nothing is done as a recompence to an evil work, therefore the heart of



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the sons of men are full in them to do evil;" that is, because men are not opposed and contradicted in their evil ways, because Divine justice doth not presently check and control sinners, because sentence is not immediately passed upon them, and judgment executed, "therefore the heart of the sons of men is full in them to do evil;" that is, therefore men grow bold and presumptuous in sin: for the Hebrew word which we render "is fully set in them," we find, (Esth. vii. 5.) where Ahasuerus says, concerning Haman, "Who is he? and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Whose heart was full to do so? *Fervit in iis cor filiorum hominum;* so some render it, "the hearts of men boil with wickedness;" are so full of it, that it works over. Men are resolute in an evil course, "their hearts are strengthened and hardened in them to do evil," so others translate the words. The translation of the LXX. is very emphatical, ἐπληροφορήθη καρδία, "the heart of the sons of men is fully persuaded and assured to do evil." All these translations agree in the main scope and sense; viz. that sinners are very apt to presume upon the long-suffering of God, and to abuse it, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in their evil ways. In the handling of this, I shall,

First, Briefly shew that it is so.

Secondly, Whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretences and colours of reason, men encourage themselves in sin from the patience of God.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to answer an objection about this matter.

First, That men are very apt to abuse the long-suffering of God, to the encouraging and hardening of themselves in an evil course, the experience of the

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world, in all ages, does give abundant testimony. Thus it was with the old world, "when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while he was preparing an ark, for the space of a hundred and twenty years," (1 Pet. iii. 20.) For the wickedness of man, which was great upon the earth, a general deluge was threatened: but God was patient, and delayed his judgment a great while: hereupon they grew secure in their impenitency, and went on in their course, as if they had no apprehension of danger, no fear of the judgment threatened. So our Saviour tells us: (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39.) "As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." And so it was with Sodom: (Luke xvii. 28.) and "likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built." And so, our Saviour tells us, it will be in the end of the world; "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." So likewise the apostle St. Paul, (Rom. ii. 4, 5.) "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The goodness and long-suffering of God, which ought in all reason to lead men to repentance, is to many an occasion of greater hardness and impenitency. So also St. Peter foretels, (2 Pet. iii. 3.) "That in the last days there should come scoffers, who should walk after their own hearts' lusts, saying, Where is the

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promise of his coming?" And we see, in daily experience, that the greatest part of sinners grow more obstinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of God's patience, and because he delays the punishment due to them for their sins. Let us consider, in the

Second place, Whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretence and colour of reason men encourage themselves in sin, from the long-suffering of God. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconsiderateness, and from an evil heart of unbelief, from the temptation and suggestion of the devil, one of whose great arts it is, to make men question the threatenings of God, and to insinuate, as he did to our first parents, either that he hath not denounced such threatenings, or that he will not execute them so severely. All these causes do concur to the producing this monstrous effect: but that which I design to inquire into, is, from what pretence of reason, grounded upon the long-suffering of God, sinners argue themselves into this confidence and presumption. For when the wise man saith, that "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil;" he does not intend to insinuate, that God's long-suffering fills the hearts of men with wicked designs and resolutions, and does, by a proper and direct efficacy, harden sinners in their course; but that wicked men, upon some account or other, do take occasion, from the long-suffering of God, to harden themselves in sin; they draw false conclusions from it to impose upon themselves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they see something in the forbearance of God,

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and his delay of punishment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil course, notwithstanding the threatenings of God.

And, therefore, I shall endeavour to shew, what those false conclusions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of punishment, and to discover the sophistry and fallacy of them; and I shall rank them under two heads; those which are more gross and atheistical; and those which are not so gross, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Those conclusions which are more gross and atheistical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, from the delay of punishment (which we, who believe a God, call the patience or long-suffering of God), are these three: either that there is no God; or, if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil.

I shall speak more briefly of these, because I hope there are but few in the world of such irregular and besotted understandings, as to make such inferences as these, from the delay of punishment.

1st, From hence some would fain conclude, that there is no God. That some are so absurd as to reason in this manner, the Scripture tells us, (Psal. xiv. 1.) "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God: they are corrupt, and have done abominable works." Now the argument that these men frame to themselves is this; God doth not take a speedy course with sinners, and revenge himself immediately upon the workers of iniquity, therefore there is no God; for if there were, he would shew himself, and not bear the affronts of sinners, when it is so easy for him to vindicate himself by a swift and speedy vengeance. Thus the poet represents

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the atheist arguing; *Nullos esse deos, inane cælum, affirmat Selius, probatque, quod se factum, dum negat hoc, videt beatum.* "Selius affirms, there are no gods, and that heaven is an empty place, and proves it, because, whilst he denies God, he sees himself in a very happy and prosperous condition."

And here it is worthy our notice, at what a contradictious rate these men reason. First, They would have no God, lest he should be just, and punish them as they deserve; and then, in another mood, they would have him to be nothing but justice and severity, lest there should be a God: as if no other notion could be framed of the Divine nature, but of a rash fury, and impetuous revenge, and an impotent passion, which, when it is offended and provoked, cannot contain itself, and forbear punishment for a moment. Justice is not such a perfection as doth necessarily exclude wisdom, and goodness, and patience; it doth in nō wise contradict the perfection of the Divine nature to bear with sinners, in expectation of their repentance and amendment; or if God foresees their final impenitency, to respite their punishment to the most fit and convenient season. God may suffer long, and yet be resolved, if sinners persist in the abuse of his goodness and patience, to execute vengeance upon them in due time. It is a pitiful ground of atheism, that because God is so much better than wicked men deserve, they will not allow him to be at all.

2dly, Others infer from the delay of punishment, that there is no providence that administers the affairs of the world, and regards the good and bad actions of men. For though the being of God be acknowledged, yet, if he do not regard what is done here below, nor concern himself in human affairs,

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sinners are as safe and free to do what they please, as if there were no God; and upon this ground, the Scripture tells us, many encourage themselves in their wickedness; (Psal. lxiv. 5.) "They encourage themselves in an evil matter; they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?" And more expressly, (Psal. xciv. 4—7.) "How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." And if this were so, well might they encourage themselves. If it were true which Epicurus saith, "That God takes no knowledge of the actions of men; that he is far removed from us, and contented with himself, and not at all concerned in what we do:" if this were true, the inference which Lucretius makes were very just; *Quare religio pedibus subjecta vicissim obteritur;* "Men might trample religion under their feet, and live without any regard to the laws of it."

But let us see how they infer this from the long-suffering of God, that he neglects the affairs of the world, and hath no consideration of the actions of men, because they see the ungodly to prosper in the world equally with others that are strictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times to be in a more prosperous and flourishing condition; "they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men." So that if there be a God, it seems (say they) that he connives at the crimes of men, and "looks on upon them that deal treacherously, and holds his peace whilst the wicked devoureth the

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man that is more righteous than himself," as the prophet expresseth it, (Habak. i. 13.)

For answer to this, I shall only give this reasonable and credible account of the long-suffering of God, and the impunity of wicked men in this life, which not only the Scripture gives us, but the heathen were able to give from the light of nature, and is agreeable to the common sense of mankind; namely, that this life is a state of probation and trial, wherein God suffers men to walk in their own ways without any visible check and restraint, and does not usually inflict present and remarkable punishments upon them for their evil deeds; because this, being a state of trial of the dispositions and manners of men, is rather the proper season of patience, than of punishments and rewards; and therefore it is very reasonable to suppose that God reserves sinners for a solemn and public trial at the great assizes of the world, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his justice upon the despisers of his patience and long-suffering, when he will make "his judgment to break forth as the light, and his righteousness as the noon-day." In the mean time, the providence of God, when he sees it fit, gives some remarkable instances of his justice upon great and notorious offenders in this life, as a pledge and earnest of a future judgment; and these, sometimes, more general, as in the destruction of the old world by an universal deluge, when "he saw the wickedness of men to be great upon the earth:" and such was that terrible vengeance which was poured down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them; which, as St. Jude tells us, "are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire," that is, of a perpetual destruction by fire.

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3dly, Another gross and atheistical inference, which men are apt to make from the delay of punishment; is, that there is no such difference of good and evil as is pretended; because they do not see the good and bad actions of men differenced in their rewards; because Divine justice doth not presently manifest itself; and every transgression and disobedience doth not immediately receive a just recompence of reward, therefore they cannot believe that the difference between good and evil is so great and evident.

For answer to this: not to insist upon the difference which the providence of God sometimes makes between them in this life, I appeal to the consciences of men, whether they do not secretly and inwardly acknowledge a clear difference between good and evil. Are not the worst of men apt to conceive better hopes of success, when they are about a just and honest undertaking, than when they are engaged in a wicked design? Do not bad men feel a secret shame and horror, when no eye sees them, and the wickedness they are about to commit doth not fall under the cognizance and censure of any human court or tribunal? Have they not many checks and rebukes in their own spirits, much disturbance and confusion of mind, when they are enterprising a wicked thing? And does not this plainly argue, that they are guilty to themselves, that they are about something which they ought not to do?

It is very true, that most men are more sensible of the evil of an action, when they feel the ill effects and consequences of it, and suffer the punishment that is due to it: but yet the sense of good and evil is so deeply impressed upon human nature, that I

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think no man, remaining a man, can quite deface and blot out the difference of good and evil. So that if men will but attend to the natural dictates and suggestions of their own minds, they cannot possibly infer, from the delay of punishment, that there is no difference of good and evil.

But because those who are thus are but few, in comparison, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindness, and height of impiety, as to disbelieve a God and a providence; and I think none have attained to that perfect conquest of conscience, as to have lost all sense of good and evil; therefore I shall rather insist,

II. Upon those kind of reasonings which are more ordinary and common among bad men, and whereby they cheat themselves into everlasting perdition; and they are such as these:

1. Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore sin is not so great an evil.

2. Therefore God is not so highly offended and provoked by it. Or,

3. God is not so severe in his own nature, as he is commonly represented.

4. Therefore the punishment of sin is not so certain. Or, however,

5. It is at a distance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death. By some such false reasonings as these, which men think may probably be collected from the patience and long-suffering of God, they harden and encourage themselves in an evil course.

1. Because the punishment of sin is deferred, therefore they conclude it is not so great an evil;

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they do not feel the ill effects of it at present; all things go well and prosperously with them, no less than with those who are so strict and conscientious; and therefore they hope there is no such great evil in sin, as melancholy people are apt to fancy to themselves. For answer to this,

(1.) Consider seriously what sin is, and then thou wilt see reason enough to call it a great evil. To sin against God, is to contemn the greatest authority in the world, to contradict the greatest holiness and purity, to abuse the greatest goodness, and to provoke almighty justice to take vengeance upon thee, and to make thee as miserable as thou art capable of being. To sin against God, is to be disobedient to thy sovereign, and unthankful to thy best benefactor, and to act contrary to the greatest obligations, against thy best reason and truest interest; to disoblige thy kindest friend, and to gratify thy worst and bitterest enemy: it is to disorder thyself, to create perpetual disquiet to thy own mind, and to do the greatest mischief possible to thyself; to deprive thyself of the greatest happiness, and to draw down upon thyself extreme and eternal misery. And what do we call a great evil if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds and all the aggravations of evil that can be, and hath all the circumstances of ugliness and deformity in it that can be imagined?

(2.) Whatever sin be in itself, yet from hence we can in no wise conclude that it is not a great evil, because the punishment of it is deferred for a while: from hence, indeed, it follows, that God is very good in deferring the punishment which is due to thee for thy sins, but by no means that sin is not very evil. The reprieve of a traitor does, indeed,

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argue the goodness and clemency of the prince, but doth not at all abate of the heinousness of the crime for which he is sentenced. The great evil of sin is evident, because the holy and just God hath forbidden it, and declared his hatred and detestation of it, and threatened it with most severe and direful punishment; but that God respites the punishment which is due to sin, and does not immediately take vengeance upon sinners, but affords them a space, and means, and opportunity of repentance, this doth not at all lessen the evil of sin, but is rather an aggravation of it, that we should offend and provoke that God who is so patient and long-suffering towards us, so very loath to bring those evils upon us, which we are so rash and forward to pull down upon ourselves.

2. If God doth not immediately punish sin upon the commission of it, and instantly let fly at the sinner, this they would construe to be a sign that he is not so highly offended and provoked by it; if he were, he would manifest his displeasure against it, by the sudden and violent effusions of his wrath. For answer to this, I desire these two things may be considered:

(1.) That God himself, in his word, every where plainly declares to us his great displeasure against sin: (Psal. v. 4, 5.) "Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity." "Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness." The words are a μείωσις, and less is spoken than is meant and intended; viz. that God is so far from taking pleasure in the sins of men, that he is highly displeased at them, and bears an implacable hatred against them.

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And do not the terrible threatenings of God against sin declare him to be highly offended at it, when he says, "that he will come in flaming fire to render vengeance to all them that know not the gospel" of his Son; and that they "shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" Can we think that all the threatenings of God's word, and all those direful curses which are written in his book, shall return empty, without doing any execution? Thou that now flatterest thyself in vain and groundless hopes, that none of these evils shall come upon thee, when thou comest to stand before the great Judge of the world, and to behold the killing frowns of his countenance, and to hear those bitter words of eternal displeasure from the mouth of God himself, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" thou wilt then believe that God is heartily angry and offended with thee for thy sins. We shall find in that day, that the threatenings of God's word, which we now hear securely, and without terror, had a full signification; or rather, that no words could convey to us the terror of them. What the Scripture says of the happiness and glory of the next life, is true also of the misery and punishments of the other world, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, those terrible things which God hath reserved for the workers of iniquity."

But, above all, the direful sufferings of the Son of God, when sin was but imputed to him, are a demonstration of God's implacable hatred of sin; for that rather than sin should go unpunished, God was pleased to subject his own Son to the suffer-

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ings due to it: this plainly shews that he hated sin, as much as he loved his own Son.

But, (2dly,) God may conceive a very great displeasure against sin, and be highly incensed and provoked by it, and yet suspend the effects of his displeasure, and defer the punishment of it for a great while: and to imagine otherwise, argues a gross mistake of the nature of God, arising from our not considering the attributes and perfections of God in conjunction and consistency with one another. When we consider one attribute of God singly, and separate it from the rest, and frame such wide and large apprehensions of it, as to exclude his other perfections, we have a false notion of God; and the reason of this mistake is, because among men, an eminent degree of any one excellency doth commonly shut out others; because, in our narrow and finite nature, many perfections cannot stand together; but it is quite otherwise in the Divine nature. In infinite perfection, all perfections do meet and consist together; one perfection doth not hinder and exclude another; and therefore, in our conceptions of God, we are to take great heed that we do not raise any one attribute or perfection of God upon the ruin of the rest.

So that it is a false imagination of God, when we so attribute justice or anger to him, as to exclude his patience and long-suffering: for God is not impotent in his anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not presently put him out of patience, so that he cannot contain his wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himself upon sinners. In this sense, God says of himself, (Isa. xxvii. 4.) "Fury is not in me." There is nothing of a rash and ungoverned passion in the wise and just God.

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Every sin, indeed, kindles his anger, and provokes his displeasure against us, and, by our repeated and continued offences, we still add fuel to his wrath; but it doth not of necessity instantly break forth like a consuming fire, and a devouring flame. The holy and righteous nature of God, makes him necessarily offended and displeased with the sins of men; but as to the manifestation of his wrath, and the effects of his anger, his wisdom and goodness do regulate and determine the proper time and circumstances of punishment.

3. From the patience of God, and the delay of punishment, men are apt to conclude, that God is not so severe in his nature as he is commonly represented. It is true, he hath declared his displeasure against sin, and threatened it with dreadful punishments; which he may do, in great wisdom, to keep the world in awe and order: but great things are likewise spoken of his mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exercise of his mercy: so that, notwithstanding all the threatenings which are denounced against sin, it is to be hoped, that when sentences come to be passed, and judgment to be executed, God will remember mercy in the midst of judgment, and that mercy will triumph over judgment; and that, as now his patience stays his hand, and turns away his wrath, so, at the last, the milder attributes of his goodness and mercy will interpose and moderate the rigour and severity of his justice; and of this, his great patience and long-suffering towards sinners for the present, seems to be some kind of pledge and earnest: he that is so slow to anger, and so loath to execute punishment, may probably be prevailed upon, by his own pity and goodness, to remit it at



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the last: and this is the more credible, because it is granted on all hands, that no person is obliged to execute his threatenings, as he is to make good his promises: he that promiseth, passeth a right to another; but he that threateneth, keeps the right and power of doing what he pleaseth in his own hands.

I shall speak a little more fully to this, because it is almost incredible how much men bear up themselves upon vain and groundless hopes of the boundless mercy of God, and "bless themselves in their hearts, saying, they shall have peace, though they walk in the imagination of their hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst;" that is, though they still persist in their vices, and add one degree of sin to another.

Now, for answer to this,

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare threatening does not necessarily infer the certainty of the event; and that the thing threatened shall infallibly come to pass: no person is obliged to perform his threatenings, as he is his promises; the threatenings of God declare what sin deserves, and what the sinner may justly expect, if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But then we are to take notice, that repentance is the only condition that is implied in the threatenings of God, and will effectually hinder the execution of them: (Jer. xviii. 7—10.) "At what instant I speak (says God) concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." Now if, when God hath pro-

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mised to do good to a people, sin will hinder the blessing promised, and bring down judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threatened.

But as to the case of final impenitency and unbelief, God, that he might strengthen his threatenings, hath added a sign of immutability to them, having confirmed them with an oath; "I have sworn (saith the Lord) that they shall not enter into my rest:" which, though it was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, the apostle to the Hebrews applies it to a final unbelief and impenitency under the gospel, of which the infidelity of the Israelites was a type and figure. Now, though God may remit of his threatenings, yet his oath is a plain declaration that he will not; because it signifies, the firm and immutable determination of his will, and thereby puts an end to all doubts and controversies concerning the fulfilling of his threatenings.

(2.) It is certainly much the wisest and safest way to believe the threatenings of God in the strictness and rigour of them, unless there be some tacit condition evidently implied in them; because if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwise, the consequence of our mistake is fatal and dreadful. It is true, indeed, that God, by his threatenings, did intend to keep sinners in awe, and to deter them from sin: but if he had any where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of these threatenings, such a revelation would quite take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and design of them; for threatenings signify very little, but upon this supposition, that, in all probability, they will be executed: and if this be true, it is the greatest madness and folly in the world to run the hazard of it.



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(3.) As for those large declarations which the Scripture makes of the boundless mercy of God to sinners, we are to limit them, as the Scripture hath done, to the time and season of mercy, which is this life, and while we are in the way. This is the day of mercy and salvation; and when this life is ended, the opportunities of grace and mercy are past, and "the day of recompence and vengeance" will begin. Now God tries us, and offers mercy to us; but if we obstinately refuse it, judgment will take hold of us.

And then we must limit the mercy of God to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are, repentance for sins past, and sincere obedience for the future: but if men continue obstinate and impenitent, and encourage themselves in sin, from the mercy and patience of God; this is not a case that admits of mercy, but, on the contrary, his justice will triumph in the ruin and destruction of those who, instead of embracing the offers of his mercy, do despise and abuse them: "He will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes; when their fear comes as desolation, and their destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon them, then they" may "call upon him, but he will not answer; they" may "seek him early, but they shall not find him." If we "despise the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance," he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpose; "with the froward he will shew himself froward," and will be, in a more especial manner, severe towards those who take encouragement from his mercy, to disbelieve and despise his threatenings. And this God hath as plainly told us, as words can express any thing: (Deut. xxix. 19, 20.)

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"And if it come to pass, that when he heareth the words of this curse, he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy, shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." Whatever right and power God hath reserved to himself about the execution of his threatenings, he hath plainly declared, that, of all others, those who encourage themselves in a sinful course, from the hopes of God's mercy, notwithstanding his threatenings, shall find no favour and mercy at his hand: whatever he may remit of his threatenings to others, he will certainly not spare those who believe so largely concerning the mercy of God, not with a mind to submit to the terms of it, but to presume so much the more upon it.

(4.) God hath not been wanting to shew some remarkable instances of his severity towards sinners in this world. As he is pleased sometimes to give good men some foretastes of heaven, and earnests of their future happiness; so likewise, by some present stroke, to let sinners feel what they are to expect hereafter; some sparks of hell do now and then fall upon the consciences of sinners. That fear which is sometimes kindled in men's consciences in this life, that horrible anguish, and those unspeakable terrors which some sinners have had experience of in this world, may serve to forewarn us of "the wrath which is to come," and to convince us of the reality of those expressions of the torments of hell, by "the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched." That miraculous deluge, which swal-

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lowed up the old world; that hell which was rained down from heaven in those terrible showers of fire and brimstone, to consume Sodom and Gomorrah; the earth opening her mouth upon Corah and his seditious company, to let them down, as it were, quick into hell: these, and many other remarkable judgments of God, in several ages, upon particular persons, and upon cities and nations, may satisfy us, in some measure, of the severity of God against sin, and be, as it were, pledges to assure sinners of the insupportable misery and torments of the next life.

(5.) The argument is much stronger the other way, that because the punishment of sinners is delayed so long, therefore it will be much heavier and severer when it comes; that the wrath of God is growing all this while, and as we fill up the measures of our sins, he fills the phial of his wrath: (Rom. ii. 5.) "And according to thy hard and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." God now keeps in his displeasure; but all the while we go on in an impenitent course, the wrath of God is continually increasing, and will at last be manifested by the righteous judgment of God upon sinners. God now exerciseth and displayeth his milder attributes, his goodness, and mercy, and patience; but these will not always hold out: there is a dreadful day a coming, wherein (as the apostle speaks) God will "shew his wrath, and make his power known," after he hath "endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." All this long time of God's patience and forbearance his wrath is kindling, and he is whetting his glittering sword, and making sharp his arrows; and this long preparation doth portend

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a much more dreadful execution; so that we should reason thus, from the long-suffering of God—God bears with us, and spares us at present, and keeps in his anger; therefore if we go on to provoke him, time will come when he will not spare, but his anger will flame forth, and his jealousy smoke against us. This is but reasonable to expect, that they who in this world forsake their own mercies, the mercy of God in the next should forsake them.

4. Another false conclusion, which men draw from the delay of punishment, is, that because it is delayed, therefore it is not so certain: the sinner escapes for the present; and though he have some misgivings and fearful apprehensions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

It is true, indeed, we are not so certain of the misery of wicked men in another world, as if it were present, and we lay groaning under the weight of it: such a certainty as this, would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and strictly call faith; for "faith is the evidence of things not seen:" but sure we have other faculties besides sense to judge of things by; we may be sufficiently certain of many things which are neither present nor sensible, of many things past and future, upon good ground and testimony: we are sure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it; we are certain that we shall die, though we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their causes, as well as in their present existence, if the causes be certain. The truth of God, who hath declared these things to us, is an abundant ground of assurance to us, though they be at a great distance: the certainty of things

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is not shaken by our wavering belief concerning them.

Besides, the very light of nature, and the common reason of mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-suffering of God, and the delay of present punishment. Though men are apt to think, that because judgment is deferred, therefore it is not certain, yet the very light of nature hath taught men to reason otherwise; that because God is so patient to sinners in this life, therefore there will a time come when they shall be punished; that because this life is a time of trial and forbearance, therefore there shall be another state after this life, which shall be a season of recompence. And by this argument chiefly it was, that the wisest of the heathen satisfied themselves concerning another state after this life, and answered the troublesome objection against the providence of God, from the unequal administration of things in the world, so visible in the afflictions and sufferings of good men, and the prosperity of the wicked; viz. that there would be another state that would adjust all these matters, and set them straight, when good and bad men should receive the full recompence of their deeds.

The 5th and last false conclusion which men draw from the long-suffering of God, and the delay of punishment, is this; That it is, however, probably, at some distance, and therefore they may sin yet a while longer, and all this danger may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, because they see men much worse than themselves, great criminals and malefactors, upon two or three days' warning, to perform this work of repentance very substantially, and to die

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with great comfort and assurance of their salvation. This is the most common delusion of all the rest, and hath been, I am afraid, the ruin of more souls than all the other which I have mentioned; they may have slain their thousands, but this its ten thousands.

For answer to this, be pleased seriously to lay to heart these following considerations, most of which I shall speak but briefly to; because I have, upon other occasions, spoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future judgment, then it is certain, at how great a distance soever it may be. That which shall be a thousand years hence, will certainly be; and it is but very small comfort and encouragement, considering the vast disproportion between time and eternity, to think, that after twenty or forty years shall be past and gone, then must I enter upon eternal misery; then will those intolerable torments begin, which shall never have an end.

(2.) But it is not certain that it is at such a distance: when we "put from us the evil day," it is, many times, nearer to us than we are aware; and when we think the judgment of God is at a great distance, the Judge may be near, even at the door. Our times are not in our own hands, but we are perfectly at the disposal of another, who, when he pleaseth, can put a period to them, and cause our breath to cease from our nostrils, and we shall not be: "There is no man hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death," saith the wise man, a little before the text. Thou dreamest, perhaps, of many years' continuance in this world, and, perhaps, in the height of this vain imagination, "the decree is sealed, and the commandment come forth" to summon thee out

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of this world, and thou art just dropping into that misery, which thou fanciest to be at such a distance; whilst thou art vainly promising thyself the ease of many years, God may say to thee, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee;" and then, where are all thy hopes?

(3.) Supposing the evil day were at a considerable distance, yet men run an infinite hazard in venturing all the hopes of their salvation upon a future repentance: for what knowest thou, O man! but thou mayest be surprised by a sudden stroke, which may give thee no warning, leave thee no space of repentance? A violent disease may seize upon thee, which may disorder thy understanding, and so weaken all thy faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reasonable operations: at the best how unfit are we for the most serious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old age is a very unseasonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakness and infirmity, and our minds are crooked and bowed down by vice, as our bodies are by age, and as hard to be recovered to their first straightness; much more is it an improper time for this work, when sickness and old age meet together. There are two things in which men, in other things wise enough, do usually miscarry; in putting off the making of their wills, and their repentance, until it be too late. Men had need then be of sound understanding, and perfect memory, when they set about matters of so great consequence in respect of their temporal and eternal concernments: especially, when men have the happiness of all eternity to take care of and provide for, they had need have their understandings about them, and all the advantages of leisure and consideration, to make a sober reflection upon their past lives, and

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make up their accounts with God, and to set all things right between him and them; and it is well if, after all, a repentance wilfully deferred so long, so short and imperfect, so confused and huddled up, will at last be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miscarriages of a long life.

(4.) Suppose thou wert sure to repent before thou leavest the world, and to do this work thoroughly, which no man can promise to himself, that deliberately delays it; yet this can be no reasonable encouragement to go on in an evil course, because we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treasure up much more sorrow and affliction to ourselves against the day of repentance, and consequently sin on, in hopes of being hereafter so much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done; as if a man should go on to break the laws, in hopes of a more severe and exemplary punishment: sure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reasonable and considerate man.

Lastly, As to the encouragement which men take from the sudden repentance of great criminals and malefactors, and their dying with so much comfort and assurance; if this be well considered, there is little comfort to be fetched from such examples. For,

1st, Though a sincere repentance in such circumstances be possible; yet it is almost impossible for the party himself concerned, much more for others, upon any good ground, to judge when it is sincere. God, who knows the hearts of men, and whether, if they had lived longer, they would, in the future course of their lives, have justified and made good their repentance and good resolutions, only knows the sincerity of it.

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But, 2dly, No certain judgment is to be made for the comfort and confidence of the party concerned; for the business is not what comfort and confidence men have, but what ground they have for it; and whereas men are apt piously to suppose that so extraordinary a comfort and assurance is wrought in them by the Spirit of God, nothing is more uncertain: because we sometimes see those who give no such testimony of their repentance, to die with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident persuasion of their salvation, as those that do. But this, certainly, is not from the Spirit of God: a natural obstinacy and courage may carry men a great way; and false and mistaken principles may fill men, for the present, with as much comfort and confidence as well-grounded hopes. In the church of Rome, great numbers of those who have led very wicked lives, after a formal confession and absolution, and some good words of encouragement from the priest, die as full of peace and comfort, to all appearance, as the best of men.

Indeed, it is very natural to men who find themselves in a desperate condition to be strangely elevated and raised, upon any hopes of escaping so great a danger as they apprehend themselves to be in; especially if these hopes be given them by a grave man, of whose piety and judgment they have a venerable opinion. When men have the sentence of death in themselves, as all wicked livers must have, they are naturally apt to be overjoyed at the unexpected news of a pardon.

To speak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which some have, upon a sudden repentance, for great and flagrant crimes; because I

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cannot discern any sufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehension of their condition, next almost to a despair of it, would much better become them; because their case is really so very doubtful in itself. There is great reason for the repentance of such persons, and it becomes them well; but I see very little reason for their great comfort and confidence, nor does it become their circumstances and condition. Let them exercise as deep repentance as is possible, and "bring forth all the fruits meet for it" that are possible in so short a time: let them humble themselves before God, and pray incessantly to him, day and night, for mercy; make all the reparation they can, for the injuries they have done, by confession, and acknowledgment, and by making satisfaction to the parties injured, if it be in their power; by giving alms to the poor; by warning others, and endeavouring to reclaim them to a better mind, and course of life; and for the rest, humbly commit themselves to the mercy of God, in Jesus Christ: let them imitate, as near as they can, the behaviour of the penitent thief, the only example the Scripture has left us of a late repentance that proved effectual, who gave the greatest testimony that could be of a penitent sorrow for his sins, and of his faith in the Saviour of the world, by a generous and courageous owning of him in the midst of his disgrace and suffering, when even his own disciples had denied and forsaken him: but we do not find in him any signs of extraordinary comfort, much less of confidence, but he humbly commended himself to the mercy and goodness of his Saviour, saying, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

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# SERMON CLI.

## THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*—ECCLES. viii. 11.

I HAVE considered how apt men are to abuse the long-suffering of God, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, and when this comes to pass; where I considered the several false conclusions which sinners draw from the delay of punishment, as if there were no God, or providence, or difference of good and evil; or else, as is more commonly pretended, that sin is not so great an evil, and that God is not so highly offended at it, or that God is not so severe as he is represented; that the punishment of sin is not so certain; or, however, it is at a distance, and may be prevented by a future repentance: all which I have spoken fully to, and endeavoured to shew the fallacy and unreasonableness of them. I shall now proceed to the

Third and last thing I propounded, which was, to answer an objection to which this discourse may seem liable, and that is this; If the long-suffering of God be the occasion of men's hardness and impenitency, then why is God so patient to sinners, when they are so prone to abuse his goodness and patience? And how is it goodness in God to forbear sinners so long, when this forbearance of his is so apt to minister to them an occasion of their farther mischief and greater ruin? It should seem, according to this, that it would be much greater

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mercy to the greatest part of sinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but instantly, upon the first occasion and provocation, to cut them off, and so to put a stop to their wickedness, and to hinder them from making themselves more miserable, by increasing their guilt, and "treasuring up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath."

This is the objection; and because it seems to be of some weight, I shall endeavour to return a satisfactory answer to it in these following particulars. And,

I. I ask the sinner if he will stand to this: art thou serious, and wouldest thou, in good earnest, have God to deal thus with thee, to take the very first advantage to destroy thee, or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miserable beyond all hopes of recovery? Consider of it again. Dost thou think it desirable, that God shall deal thus with thee, and let fly his judgments upon thee, so soon as ever thou hast sinned? If not, why do men trifle, and make an objection against the long-suffering of God, which they would be very loath should be made good upon them?

II. It is likewise to be considered, that the long-suffering of God towards sinners is not a total forbearance: it is usually so mixed with afflictions and judgments of one kind or other, upon ourselves or others, as to be a sufficient warning to us, if we would consider and lay it to heart, to "sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon us:" lest that judgment which we saw inflicted upon others come home to us. And is not this great goodness to warn us, when he might destroy us? to leave room for a retreat, when he might put our case past remedy?

All this time of God's patience he threatens sin-

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ners, to awaken them out of their security; he punisheth them gently, that we may have no ground to hope for impunity; he makes examples of some in a more severe and remarkable manner, that others may hear, and fear, and be afraid to commit the like sins, lest the like punishment overtake them; he whips some offenders before our eyes, to shew us what sin deserves, and what we also may justly expect, if we do the same thing: and will nothing be a warning to us, but our own sufferings!

Nay, God doth usually send some judgment or other upon every sinner in this life; he lets him feel the rod, that he may know that it is "an evil and bitter thing to sin against him." He exerciseth men with many afflictions, and crosses, and disappointments, which their own consciences tell them are the just recompences of their deeds; and by these lighter strokes, he gives us a merciful warning to avoid his heavier blows; when mercy alone will not work upon us and win us, but, being fed to the full, we grow wanton and foolish, he administers physic to us by affliction, and by adversity endeavours to bring us to consideration and a sober mind; and many have been cured this way, and the judgments of God have done them that good, which his mercies and blessings could not; for God would save us any way, by his mercy or by his judgment, by sickness or by health, by plenty or by want, by what we desire, or by what we dread; so desirous is he of our repentance and happiness, that he leaves no method unattempted that may probably do us good; he strikes upon every passion in the heart of man; he works upon our love by his goodness, upon our hopes by his promises, and upon our fears, first by his threatenings, and if they be not

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effectual, then by his judgments; he tries every affection, and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himself; and will nothing warn us but what will ruin us, and render our case desperate and past hope!

And if any sinner be free from outward afflictions and sufferings, yet sin never fails to carry its own punishment along with it; there is a secret sting and worm, a Divine *nemesis* and revenge that is bred in the bowels of every sin, and makes it a heavy punishment to itself; the conscience of a sinner doth frequently torment him, and his guilt haunts and dogs him wherever he goes; for whenever a man commits a known and wilful sin, he drinks down poison, which, though it may work slowly, yet it will give him many a gripe, and, if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.

So that the long-suffering of God is wisely ordered, and there is such a mixture of judgments in it, as is sufficient to awaken sinners, and much more apt to deter them from sin, than to encourage them to go on and continue in it.

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of God than to harden men by his long-suffering. This the Scripture most expressly declares; (2 Pet. iii. 9.) "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He hath a very gracious and merciful design in his patience towards sinners, and is therefore good, that he may make us so, and that we may cease to do evil. The event of God's long-suffering may, by our own fault and abuse of it, prove our ruin; but the design and intention of it is our repentance. "He winks at the sins of men (saith the son of Sirach) that they may repent." He passeth



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them by, and does not take speedy vengeance upon sinners for them, that they may have time to repent of them, and "to make their peace with them while they are yet in the way."

Nay, his long-suffering doth not only give space for repentance, but is a great argument and encouragement to it. That he is so loath to surprise sinners, that he gives them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, to consider what they have done, and to retract it by repentance, is a sufficient intimation that he hath no mind to ruin us, that "he desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." And should not this goodness of his make us sorry that we have offended him? Doth it not naturally lead and invite us to repentance? What other interpretation can we make of his patience, what other use in reason should we make of it, but to repent and return that we may be saved?

IV. There is nothing in the long-suffering of God, that is in truth any ground of encouragement to men in an evil course; the proper and natural tendency of God's goodness is to lead men to repentance, and by repentance to bring them to happiness; (Rom. ii. 4.) "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" This St. Peter, with relation to these very words of St. Paul, interprets, "leading to salvation;" (2 Pet. iii. 15.) "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, as our beloved brother Paul also hath written unto you." Now where did St. Paul write so, unless in this text; "not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance?" It is not only great ignorance, and

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a very gross mistake, to think that it is the design and intention of God's patience and long-suffering to encourage men in sin; but likewise to think, that, in the nature of the thing, goodness can have any tendency to make men evil; "not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance."

V. That through the long-suffering of God sinners are hardened in their evil ways, is wholly to be ascribed to their abuse of God's goodness; it is neither the end and intention, nor the proper and natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event of it through our own fault. And is this any real objection against the long-suffering of God? May not God be patient, though sinners be impenitent? May not he be good, though we be so foolish as to make an ill use of his goodness? Because men are apt to abuse the mercies and favours of God, is it therefore a fault in him to bestow them upon us? Is it not enough for us to abuse them, but will we challenge God also of unkindness in giving them? May not God use wise and fitting means for our recovery, because we are so foolish as not to make a wise use of them? And must he be charged with our ruin, because he seeks by all means to prevent it? Is it not enough to be injurious to ourselves, but will we be unthankful to God also? When God hath laid out "the riches of his goodness and patience" upon sinners, will they challenge him as accessary to their ruin? As if a foolish heir, that hath prodigally wasted the fair estate that was left him, should be so far from blaming himself, as to charge his father with undoing him. Are these the best returns which the infinite mercy and patience of God hath deserved from us? "Do we thus requite the Lord, foolish people and unwise!"



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God's patience would save sinners, but they ruin themselves by their abuse of it: let the blame then lie where it is due, and let God have the glory of his goodness, though men refuse the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. And lastly; But because this objection pincheth hardest in one point, viz. that God certainly foresees that a great many will abuse his long-suffering, to the increasing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is long-suffering any mercy and goodness to those, who he certainly foreknows will in the event be so much the more miserable, for having had so much patience extended to them? Therefore, for a full answer, I desire these six things may be considered:

1. That God designs this life for the trial of our obedience, that, according as we behave ourselves, he may reward or punish us in another world.

2. That there could be no trial of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and punishments, but upon the supposition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and necessity, but upon free choice.

3. That God, by virtue of the infinite perfection of his knowledge, does clearly and certainly foresee all future events, even those which are most contingent, such as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary agents. This I know hath been denied, but without reason; since it is not only contrary to the common apprehensions of mankind, from the very light of nature, that God should not foreknow future events, but to clear and express Scripture; and that in such instances, for the sake of which they deny God's fore-knowledge, in general, of the future actions of free and voluntary agents; I mean, that

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the Scripture expressly declares God's determinate fore-knowledge of the most wicked actions; as the crucifying of Christ, who is said, "according to the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God," to have been "by wicked hands crucified and slain."

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the sight and knowledge of things present hath upon them to make them to be present. I may see or know that the sun is risen, without being the cause of its rising; and no more is bare knowledge of future events the cause that they are when they are. And if any man ask, how God can certainly foreknow things which depend upon free and arbitrary causes, unless he do some way decree and determine them? I answer, that this is not a fair and reasonable demand to ask of men, who have but finite understandings, to make out and declare all the ways that infinite knowledge hath of knowing and of foreseeing the actions of free creatures, without prejudice to their liberty and freedom of acting. However, it is, of the two, much more credible to reason, that infinite knowledge should certainly foreknow things, which our understandings cannot imagine how they should be foreknown, than that God should any ways be the author of sin, by determining and decreeing the wicked actions of men. The first only argues the imperfection of our understanding; but the other lays the greatest blemish and imperfection that can be upon the Divine nature.

So that this difficult controversy about the fore-knowledge of God is brought to this point, whether a man had better believe that infinite knowledge may be able to foreknow things in a way which our

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finite understanding cannot comprehend; or to ascribe something to God, from whence it would unavoidably follow, that he is the author of sin. The first is only a modest and just acknowledgment of our own ignorance, the last is the utmost and greatest absurdity that a man can be brought to; and to say that we cannot believe the fore-knowledge of God, unless we can make out the particular manner of it, is more unreasonable, than if an ignorant man should deny a difficult proposition in Euclid, or Archimedes, to be demonstrated, because he knows not how to demonstrate it.

5. And consequently, fore-knowledge and liberty may very well consist; and, notwithstanding God's fore-knowledge of what men will do, they may be as free as if he did not foreknow it. And,

Lastly, That God doth not deal with men according to his fore-knowledge of the good or bad use of their liberty, but according to the nature and reason of things; and therefore, if he be long-suffering toward sinners, and do not cut them off upon the first provocation, but give them a space and opportunity of repentance, and use all proper means and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford his grace to excite good resolutions in them, and to second and assist them, and they refuse and resist all this; their wilful obstinacy and impenitency is as culpable, and God's goodness and patience as much to be acknowledged, as if God did not foresee the abuse of it; because his foresight and knowledge of what they would do laid no necessity upon them to do what they did.

If a prince had the privilege of fore-knowledge, as God hath, and did certainly foresee that a great many of his subjects would certainly incur the pe-

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nalty of his laws, and that others would abuse his goodness and clemency to them; yet, if he would govern them like free and reasonable creatures, he ought to make the same wise laws to restrain their exorbitancy, and to use the same clemency in all cases that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all foresee what they would do, nor how they would abuse his clemency; for it is nevertheless fit to make wise and reasonable laws, and to govern with equity and clemency, though it were certainly foreseen that they that are governed would act very foolishly and unreasonably in the use of their liberty. It is great goodness in God to give men the means and opportunity of being saved, though they abuse his goodness to their farther ruin; and he may be heartily grieved for that folly and obstinacy in men, which he certainly foresees will end in their ruin; and may, with great seriousness and sincerity, wish they would do otherwise, and were as "wise to do good," as they are "wilful to do evil." And thus he is represented in Scripture, as regretting the mischief which men wilfully bring upon themselves: "O that they were wise! O that they would understand, and consider their latter end!"

And this is sufficient to vindicate the goodness of God in his patience and long-suffering to sinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befals them for their wilful contempt and abuse of it.

I shall draw some inferences from this whole discourse upon this argument.

I. This shews the unreasonableness and perverse disingenuity of men, who take occasion to harden and encourage themselves in sin from the long-suffering of God, which, above all things in the world, should melt and soften them. Thou hast sinned,

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and art liable to the justice of God; sentence is gone forth, but God respites the execution of it, and hath granted thee a reprieve, and time and opportunity to sue out thy pardon. Now what use ought we in reason to make of this patience of God towards us? We ought certainly "to break off our sins by" a speedy "repentance, lest iniquity be our ruin;" immediately to sue out our pardon, and "to make our peace with God, while we are yet in the way," and to resolve never any more willingly to offend that God, who is so gracious and merciful, so long-suffering and full of compassion. But what use do men commonly make of it? They take occasion to confirm and strengthen themselves in their wickedness, and to reason themselves into vain and groundless hopes of impunity. Now what a folly is this, because punishment doth not come, therefore to hasten it, and to draw it down upon ourselves? Because it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Because there is yet a possibility of escaping it, therefore to take a certain course to make it unavoidable? Because there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our case desperate and past remedy? See how unreasonably men bring ruin upon themselves; so that well might the Psalmist ask that question, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?"

But their folly and unreasonableness is not so great, but their perverseness and disingenuity is greater. To sin because God is long-suffering, is "to be evil because he is good," and to provoke him, because he spares us: it is to strive with God, and to contend with his goodness, as if we were resolved to try the utmost length of his patience; and because God is loath to punish, therefore to urge

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and importune him to that which is so contrary to his inclination.

II. This may serve to convince men of the great evil and danger of thus abusing the long-suffering of God. It is a provocation of the highest nature, because it is to trample upon his dearest attributes, those which he most delights and glories in, his goodness and mercy; for the long-suffering of God is his goodness to the guilty, and his mercy to those who deserve to be miserable.

Nothing makes our ruin more certain, more speedy, and more intolerable, than the abuse of God's goodness and patience. After God had borne long with that rebellious people, the children of Israel, and, notwithstanding all their murmurings, all their infidelity and impenitency, had spared them ten times, at last he sets his seal to their ruin: (Heb. iii. 8, 9.) "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers proved me, and saw my works forty years." This was a high provocation indeed, to harden their hearts under the patience and long-suffering of God, after forty years' trial and experience of it: (ver. 10.) "Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They are a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways." And what was the issue of all this? Upon this God takes up a fixed resolution to bear no longer with them, but to cut them off from the blessings he had promised to bestow upon them; "He sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest.—To whom sware he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" Or as the word may be rendered, "to them that were disobedient?" that is, to them who went on in their

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rebellion against him, after he had suffered their manners forty years.

And as the abuse of God's patience renders our destruction more certain, so more speedy and more intolerable. We think, that because God suffers long he will suffer always; and because punishment is delayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come the sooner for this: so our Lord tells us, (Luke xii.) when the servant said, his lord delayed his coming; "the lord of that servant shall come in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." None so like to be surprised by the judgment of God, as those who trespass so boldly upon his patience.

III. To persuade us to make a right use of the patience and long-suffering of God, and to comply with the merciful end and design of God therein.

1. It is the design of God's long-suffering to give us a space of repentance. Were it not that God had this design and reasonable expectation from us, he would not reprieve a sinner for one moment, but would execute his judgments upon him so soon as ever he had offended. This our Saviour declares to us by the parable of the fig-tree, (Luke xiii. 6.) Were it not that God expects from us the fruit of repentance, he would cut us down, and not suffer us to cumber the ground: after he had "waited three years, seeking fruit and finding none, he spares it one year more, to see if it would bear fruit."

2. The long-suffering of God is a great encouragement to repentance. We see by his patience that he is not ready to take advantage against us; that he spares us when we offend, is a very good

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sign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus natural light would reason; and so the King of Nineveh, a heathen, reasons, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?" But we are fully assured of this by the gracious declarations of the gospel, and the way of pardon and forgiveness, which is therein established through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, who was made a "propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Therefore the long-suffering of God should be a powerful argument to us, "to break off our sins by repentance:" for this is the end of God's patience; "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live." God every where expresseth a vehement desire and earnest expectation of our repentance and conversion. (Jer. iv. 14.) "O Jerusalem! wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." And, (chap. xiii. 27.) "Woe unto thee, Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" He who is so patient as to the punishment of our sins, is almost impatient of our repentance for them; "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" And can we stand out against his earnest desire of our happiness, whom we have so often and so long provoked to make us miserable?

Let us then return into ourselves, and think seriously what our case and condition is; how we have lived, and how long the patience of God hath suffered our manners, and waited for our repentance, and how inevitable and intolerable the misery of those must be who live and die in the contempt and abuse of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked

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lives, and say, "What have we done?" How careless have we been of our own happiness, and what pains have we taken to undo ourselves!

Let us speedily set about this work, because we do not know how long the patience of God may last, and the opportunities of our salvation be continued to us. This day of God's grace and patience will have an end; therefore, as the prophet exhorts, (Isa. lv. 6.) "Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." Now God graciously invites sinners to come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them depart from him; when they shall cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and the door of mercy shall be shut against them.

All the while thou delayest this necessary work, thou venturest thy immortal soul, and puttest thy eternal salvation upon a desperate hazard; and should God snatch thee suddenly away in an impenitent state, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and God is yet reconcileable, but death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the best thy life is uncertain, and death will infallibly put a period to this day of God's grace and patience.

Repentance is a work so necessary, that methinks no man should lose so much time as to deliberate, whether he should set about it or not; *De necessariis nulla est deliberatio;* "No man deliberates about what he must do, or be undone if he do it not." It is a work of so great consequence and concernment, and the delay of it so infinitely dangerous, that one would think no wise man could en-

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tertain a thought of deferring it. What greater folly and stupidity can there be, than for men to venture their immortal souls, and to run an apparent hazard in matters of everlasting consequence.

This day of God's patience is the great opportunity of our salvation; and if we let it slip, it is never to be recovered: if we misimprove this time of our life, we shall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our state of trial ends with this life; after that God will prove us no more; then we shall wish, "O that I had known, in that my day, the things which belonged to my peace! but now they are hid from mine eyes: therefore to-day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord break forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed. Exercise repentance in the time of health, and defer not till death to be justified."

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# SERMON CLII.

## THE POWER OF GOD.

*God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.*—PSALM lxii. 11.

IN treating of the attributes of God, I have considered those which relate to the Divine understanding, to which I referred his knowledge and wisdom; those also which relate to the Divine will; viz. God's justice, truth, holiness, and goodness: I come now to consider his power of acting, which is his omnipotency; this I shall speak to from these words.

In the beginning of this Psalm, David declares that God was the great object of his trust and confidence, and that all his hopes and expectation of safety and deliverance were from him, (ver. 1, 2.) And this makes him challenge his enemies for all their mischievous qualities and devices against him, as vain attempts, (ver. 3, 4.) Hereupon he chargeth himself to continue his trust and confidence in God, from whom was all his expectation, and who was able to save and deliver him, (ver. 5—7.) And from his example and experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to trust in God, (ver. 8.) and that from two arguments.

1. Because all other objects of our trust and confidence are vain and insufficient, and will fail those that rely upon them. If we will rely upon any thing in this world, it must either be persons or things; but we cannot safely repose our trust in either of these. Not in persons: they may be reduced to one of

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these two heads, either high or low: those that are of a mean condition, it would be in vain to trust them; they that cannot secure themselves from meanness, cannot secure others from mischief; "Men of low degree are vanity:" but the great ones of the world, they seem to promise something of assistance and security to us; but if we depend upon them, they will frustrate us; "Men of high degree are a lie." As for the things of the world, that which men usually place their confidence in, is riches; these are either got by unlawful or lawful means; if they be ill gotten, by oppression or robbery, they will be so far from securing us from evil, that they will bring it upon us; if they be well gotten, they are of such an uncertain nature, that we have little reason to place our hopes in them; "if riches increase, set not your hearts upon them;" that is, your hope; for heart in Scripture signifies any of the affections.

2. Because God is the proper object of our trust and confidence. We may safely rely upon any one, in whom these two things concur—a power to help us, and goodness to incline him so to do. Now David tells us, that both these are eminently in God, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him; power, (ver. 11.) and goodness, (ver. 12.)

I shall speak to that which David makes the first ground of our confidence, the power of God; "power belongs to God:" for which he brings the testimony of God himself; "once hath God spoken, yea, twice have I heard this." Some interpreters trouble themselves about the meaning of this expression, as if it did refer to some particular revelation of God: and then again, they are troubled how to reconcile God's speaking this but once, with David's hearing it twice: but I do not love to spy mysteries in those expres-

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sions, which are capable of a plain sense; for I understand no more by it but this, that God hath several times revealed this; he frequently declared himself by this attribute, "once, yea twice;" that is, he hath spoken it often, and David had heard it often. This is answerable to that phrase of the Latins, *Semel atque iterum;* and it is usual in all writers, to use a certain number for an uncertain, and particularly among poets, *Felices ter et amplius.*—Horace. And so in the poetical writers of Scripture: (Job v. 19.) He hath "delivered thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee;" that is, in several and various troubles. (Eccles. xi. 2.) "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight;" that is, distribute thy charity to many: and, which is nearest to this, (Job xl. 5.) "Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther;" that is, I have had several discourses with my friends: and (xxxiii. 14.) "God speaketh once, yea, twice, in a dream, in a vision of the night;" that is, God reveals himself in several ways and manners to men: so here, "God hath spoken once, yea, twice;" that is, God hath often declared this. And if I would be so curious to refer to a particular declaration of God, I should think that it related either to the preface to the law, "I am the Lord thy God," that is, the great and powerful God, "that brought thee out of the land of Egypt;" or rather to the declaration which God made of himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of the Almighty God, (Gen. xvii. 1.) Concerning which revelation of God, it is said expressly, (Exod. vi. 3.) "I appeared unto Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah, was I not known to them."

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But that which I design to speak to is the proposition itself, that power belongs to God; that is, that the excellency of power, power in its highest degree and perfection, all power belongs to God; that is, that omnipotence is a property or perfection of the Divine nature.

In the handling of this I shall shew,

First, What we are to understand by the omnipotence of God.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God.

First, What we are to understand by the omnipotence of God. And this I shall consider,

I. As to the principle. And,

II. As to the exercise of it.

I. As to the principle; it is an ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks power and perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of God; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer; an ability to do all things which are consistent with itself, and with the Divine nature and perfection; by which we must mean an executive power, the effect whereof is without himself; for what he is said to do within himself, the acts of his understanding and will, as we conceive his will to be distinct from his power, are not to be referred to his omnipotence. To have a right conception of omnipotence, we must imagine the most perfect active principle that we can, and it is still something more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our conception,

1. Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it de-



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ponds, and to which it is perfectly subject and subordinate.

2. A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any considerable, much less effectual resistance, which can check and countermand at pleasure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine besides this; because we cannot imagine any other power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a most perfect manner, and can do all things at once, and in an instant, and that with ease. We can but do one thing at once; and the greater and more considerable it is, the more time it will ask us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done: but God, to whose knowledge all things are present at once, and together, and the acts of whose will are as quick and perfect as of his understanding, hath a power answerable to the perfection of both; and therefore it is as easy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as successively, and in time. For this is the privilege of an infinite Spirit, that it does not only act without hands and material engines or instruments, as every spirit doth, but without motion from one place to another; because he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing else but a willing that such a thing be done; and, *ipso facto*, every thing is so, as he wills it should be, and when he wills it should be; as if things did start up into

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being, or vanish out of being, as if they did break forth into being, and sculk again into nothing, and undergo such and such changes, *ad nutum voluntatis*, "at the beck of his will." And this is the most perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the Scripture seems to express to us, when it represents God as making things by his word, upholding all things by the word of his power; as if he did but speak the word, and say, Let such a thing be, and it was so; as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an express act of the Divine will, which is all we can understand by God's speaking, by his word, and voice, and saying, Let things be; but the least that it can signify, is the quick and speedy manner of working, whereby God is able to do things in an instant, as soon as a word can be spoken.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an instant, so with ease, without any pain or laborious endeavour; for what is it that can object any difficulty to him? At the first creation of things, there was nothing to resist him; and since the creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and consequently all, whose power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is subject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the infinite power of God; so that we may imagine the Divine power would pass through all the resistance that all created power can make, and all the difficulties it can object to it, with more ease than a bullet passeth through the thin air, or a man would pass through a net of cobweb.

5. The most perfect active principle we can imagine, the utmost bounds and limits of whose perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have



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imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the omnipotence of God as to the principle, which hath no bounds and limits. And,

II. As to the exercise of it, it is only limited by the Divine will and wisdom. The Divine will determines it to its exercise, the Divine wisdom directs and regulates the exercise of it; that is, God exerciseth his power willingly, and not by necessity, and in such manner, for the producing such effects, and in order to such ends and purposes, as seem best to his wisdom. Hence he is said to act all things according to his good pleasure, and according to the counsel of his will; that is, freely and wisely.

As to the extent of this power, I said it was an ability to do all things that are consistent with itself, and with the nature and perfection of God.

First, That are consistent with itself; that is, with a power to do all things. It is a contradiction to imagine that omnipotence can do that, which, if it could be done, would render all power insignificant. Upon this account, the Divine power is not said to extend to the working of any thing which implies a contradiction, and the terms whereof speak a repugnancy to one another, and mutually destroy one another, and the doing whereof is contrary to the nature of the thing which is supposed to be done; that is, is nonsense, and cannot be imagined to be. For example, that a thing should be, and not be, at the same time. For a power to make a thing to be,

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so as it should not be while it is, signifies nothing, because such a being as is not, is nothing; and to make such a being, would be to do nothing, and consequently such a power would signify nothing. So likewise we cannot say, that the Divine power can cause that the same thing should be made and not be made; that that which hath been, should not have been; for the power which makes a thing, so as that it was not made, and causeth a thing to have been, so as that it hath not been, does nothing; and consequently is no power. Nor can we say, that the Divine power can effect that any thing should be made by itself; that is, be the cause of its own being; for that would be to cause that a thing should be before it is; that is, be when it is not, which signifies nothing. We cannot say, that the Divine power can effect, that twice two should not make four; for that would be to cause that things should not be what they are, if they be at all; which is to cause that things should be, and not be at all, when they are, which amounts to nothing.

We cannot say, the Divine power can make a sound to be seen, and colour to be heard; for that would be to make colour and sound all one; that is, things that differ, to be the same while they differ, which is to make colour and sound not to be colour and sound while they are so; which is to do nothing, and consequently argues no power.

We cannot say, that the Divine power can make that which is intrinsically and essentially good to be evil; and on the contrary: or that which is necessarily true to be false; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinsically and essentially good to be evil, is to make that which is always

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good to be sometimes evil; that is, to be evil whilst it is good; that is, to make good and evil all one; which is to bring two things together, which so soon as they do exist, destroy one another, which is to no purpose, because it is to do just nothing; and there is the same reason of true and false.

We cannot say, that the power of God can cause that the same thing should be hot and cold, dead and alive, at the same time, because these destroy one another; and if they were both, neither of them would be, and so the effect we attribute to this power would be nothing.

We cannot say, that the Divine power can effect that the same impression should give a thing two contrary motions, upward and downward, at the same time; that the same body should be in two contrary postures, in motion and at rest, and in several places, which are the contradictions of transubstantiation; for the same body to be at the same time in two several places, is to be limited and circumscribed by each of these; that is, so to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other; so that if it be in this place, it is not in that, nor in any other besides this; if it be in that place, it is not in this, nor any other besides that; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and therefore in neither of them, nor any where else; so that a power to make a body to be in two places at once, is a power to make it to be no where; that is, not to be at all, which is no power; and there is the same reason of the same bodies being in contrary motion, or in motion and at rest, or in two contrary postures at the same time.

So that by all these instances, it appears, that a power to do any thing which implies a contradic-

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tion, and is repugnant to the nature of things, signifies nothing; and the supposed effect of it is only to bring terms together, which, if they could be brought together, so soon as they meet, will mutually take away and destroy one another, which would be vain, and to no purpose.

I have the more explicitly laid open these contradictions, with relation to the gross doctrine of transubstantiation, in which all or most of the contradictions which I have mentioned, are involved. I know they stiffly deny that these contradictions follow from that doctrine, and use pitiful shifts to avoid them; but being not able to satisfy themselves that way, if the worst should come to the worst, they can grant these contradictions, but then they fly to the power of God, which can do things which we call contradictions; or else they say, there are as many contradictions in the doctrine of the trinity, which all Christians believe. And thus they reproach Christianity to defend popery; and if they cannot persuade men to be papists, do what they can to make them atheists, or at least to hinder them from being Christians; but there is not so much malice in this objection, but there is as little strength. Is it any contradiction, that the same thing should be three and one in several respects? which is all that the Scripture teacheth concerning the Trinity: but if men will undertake to explain this more particularly than God thought fit to do, and do it in such a manner, as that they cannot free themselves from contradiction, let them look to it; the Christian religion is not at all concerned in this farther than to censure such men's boldness and curiosity.

But against this exemption of things that imply a

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contradiction from the compass and extent of the Divine power, there are two objections which are more considerable, and deserve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant God's fore-knowledge of future events, which seem to us to be impossible to be foreknown. Now, why may we not as well grant that God can do things which seem to us impossible to be done by any other power, as foreknow things which it is impossible for any understanding to know? For why should we pretend to know the utmost of what infinite power can do, any more than the utmost of what infinite understanding can know?

Answer.—I know no reason but that the argument should be granted, if there were an equal necessity of granting the possibility of those things which seem to us impossible to be done, that there is of granting the possibility of foreknowing future contingencies, though they seem to us impossible to be known. We must grant the possibility of foreknowing future contingencies, because the Scripture, which we believe to be a Divine revelation, expressly tells us, that God doth foreknow them, and gives us instances of it in several prophecies and predictions. Now, if any man can shew me as express texts, which say, that God can make a body to be in two places at once, I would believe it, though I do not see how it is possible; because it is reasonable I should believe that infinite power can do many things, the possibility of which my finite understanding cannot reach. Now, whereas the papists say, the Scripture hath said, that from which this necessarily follows, viz. "This is my body;" this is not enough, unless they could either prove that it is necessary to understand all texts of

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Scripture in a rigorous and strict propriety of the letter, without admitting of any trope or figure in the words, which they do not pretend; or else shew a clear reason why this should be understood so, more than a thousand others; which they have not done, and I think never can do.

But if it be farther argued; if we grant in one case, that those things which seem to be contradictions to us, may be possible, why not in all cases; unless we had some certain way of distinguishing between seeming contradictions and real ones? And if we grant all contradictions possible, then there is no reason to exempt these from the extent of the Divine power; but we may safely say, that the Divine power can make a thing to be, and not to be, at the same time. To this I answer,

1. I do not grant that any thing which seems to me to be a contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be possible, unless I have higher assurance and greater reason to believe it to be possible, than I have to believe it to be a contradiction: for example, suppose it were clearly revealed in Scripture, that two bodies may be in the same place, and at the same time (which is not, nor any thing like it); then, having a revelation for this, and no revelation that it is not a contradiction, I have higher assurance, and greater reason to believe it possible, than that it is a contradiction; and consequently, I have reason to believe it is no contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the same thing may be, and not be, at the same time: but though in case of Divine revelation, I may believe that to be no contradiction, which seems to me to be a contradiction; yet I am not, without great necessity and clear evidence, to offer violence to rea-

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son, and affront the faculty of understanding which God hath endowed me withal, by entertaining any thing which seems to me to be a contradiction; which the papists do in the business of transubstantiation, without any evidence of revelation, and consequently without necessity.

2. But if this were revealed in Scripture, that the same thing may be, and not be, at the same time, I could have no reason to believe that, because I could have no assurance, if that were true, that the Scriptures were a Divine revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were; for if it were true, that the same thing may be and not be, then a Divine revelation may be no Divine revelation; and when I am bound to believe a thing, I may be bound at the same time not to believe it; and so all things would fall into uncertainty, and the foundation of all assurance, and of all duty and obedience, both of faith and practice, would be taken away.

The second objection is from the power of creation, which is generally acknowledged to be a making of something out of nothing. Now, say the objectors, this seems as palpable a contradiction as any thing else.

Answer.—To us, indeed, who converse with material things, and never saw any thing made but out of pre-existent matter, it is very hard to conceive how any thing should be created, that is, produced out of nothing: but every thing that is strange is not a contradiction. It is strange to us, and hard to conceive, that there should be such a thing as a spirit, who never saw, nor can see any thing but matter; and yet we grant there are spirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any thing should be made but out of matter; and yet spirit, if it were

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made of any thing pre-existent, cannot be made of matter: but if we will attend to those common dictates of reason, which every man, whether he will or no, must assent to, we may easily understand creation to be possible, and free from contradiction. For the clearing of this, I will proceed by these steps:

1. The true notion of creation is, the bringing of something into being, which before had no being at all; for the phrase of making something out of nothing, or out of no pre-existent matter, does mislead our understandings into odd conceits, as if nothing could be the material cause of something, or as if nothing could be what is material.

2. Every one must grant, that something is; for we see that things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one must grant, that something is of itself, whether matter, or that being which we call God.

4. Every one must grant, that that which was of itself, was always; for nothing can begin of itself.

5. It is much more easy to conceive how a thing, that once was not, might sometimes be brought into being by another, than how a thing should be always of itself; for that which once was not, is supposed to have something before it, by which it might be made, though not out of which it was made; but that which was always, neither had, nor could have any thing, by which or out of which it could be made. And why cannot a thing come into being, when there was nothing before it out of which it was made, as well as a thing be always, when there could not be any thing before it out of which it should be?

Secondly, I exempt those things from the extent of omnipotence, which imply imperfection, which

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are contrary to the nature and perfection of God, both natural and moral imperfections; for these also destroy power, because they are not arguments of power, but of impotence. Natural imperfections; as, to die, to be sick, to be in want, to eat, to sleep, to forget, &c. Moral imperfections, those which contradict the holiness of God, as sin and vice, or to compel any to sin; which contradict his goodness, as to be cruel; which contradict his truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his promise, to deny himself. (Tit. i. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 13; Jam. i. 12.) He is said to be ἀπείραστος κακῶν, contrary to the constancy and immutability of his nature, as to change his decree, to repent; contrary to justice and equity, as for ever to spare and to pardon obstinate sinners, eternally to punish innocent and good men; for these are moral imperfections, and contradict the holiness, and truth, and goodness, and justice, and immutability of the Divine nature; and that distinction between God's absolute and ordinate power, that is, that God hath an absolute power of doing some things, which yet, upon supposition of his decree, or promise, or goodness, or justice, he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unless men mean by it only this, that some things which argue an imperfection, do not imply a contradiction, which is most true; but both these are absolutely and equally impossible to God. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, that this perfection belongs to God: and this I shall shew,

I. From the dictates of natural light.

II. From Scripture or Divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural light. This was one of the most usual titles which the heathens gave to their supreme Deity, *Optimus Maximus;* next to

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his goodness they placed his greatness, which does chiefly appear in his power; and they did not only attribute a great power to him, but an omnipotence. *Nihil est quod Deus efficere, non potest,* (saith Tully de Div.) Now their natural reason did convince them, that this perfection did belong to God by these three arguments:

1. From those two great instances and expressions of his power, creation and providence; for the heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the world, and the preservation and government of it, to be the effects of power, determined by goodness, and regulated by wisdom. Hence they gave those titles to God of *Opifex Rerum,* and *Rector Mundi.* I say generally; I except Aristotle, who supposed the world not to have been made, but to have been from eternity; and Epicurus with his followers, who ascribed the regular and orderly frame of nature to a happy casualty and fortunate concourse of atoms: but, generally, the wiser did look upon the vast frame of nature, this stately fabric of the world, and the upholding and preserving of it, as an argument of a Divine and invisible power. And so the apostle tells us, (Rom. i. 20.) that by the light of nature "the invisible things of God were clearly seen by the things that were made, even his eternal power and Godhead."

2. Because all other perfections, without this, would be insignificant and ineffectual, or else could not be at all. Without this, goodness would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demonstration of itself; knowledge would be an idle speculation; and wisdom to contrive things, without power to effect them, would be an useless thing. There would be no such thing as

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justice, if the Divine nature were without a power to reward and punish; no such thing as faithfulness, if he had not a power to perform what he promises; no providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no power, to take upon him to govern and to intermeddle in the affairs of the world.

3. Without this there could be no religion. Take away the power of God, and there can be no foundation of faith and trust, no reason for fear; all arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm, from an impotent being that could do nothing. The sanction of God's laws would be taken away. To give authority to laws, there must not only be a right to command, but power to back those commands; the grand security and last resort of all government and authority is power. (James iv. 12.) "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy." None can be a lawgiver, but he that hath this power, to reward and punish, to make men happy or miserable, "to save, or to destroy." Men would not pray to God, nor make any address to him, if they did not believe he was able to supply their wants, and relieve them in their straits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales consensissent alloquendi surda numina et inefficaces deos.*—Seneca. There would be no encouragement for men to serve God, if they did not believe that he was able to reward them, and bring them to happiness, and to defend them against all the enemies of their welfare, so that it should not be in the power of the most malicious spirits to hinder them of their happiness.

II. From Scripture, or Divine revelation. In producing texts to this purpose, I will proceed by these steps:

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1. Take notice of those which in general ascribe power, and might, and strength to God. (Psal. xxiv. 8.) "The Lord, strong and mighty." "So girt with power; the mighty God; thine is the greatness and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." Of the same nature are those places which call upon all creatures to ascribe this to God; "Give unto the Lord, ye mighty; give unto the Lord glory and strength."

2. Those which ascribe this to God in an eminent degree. (Job ix. 4.) "He is mighty in strength; excellent in power; who is like unto him? The Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

3. Those texts which ascribe such a power as transcends any human or created power. Such as those which express all the power which men have to be derived from God: (John xix. 11.) "Thou couldest have no power at all, except it were given thee from above." And those which advance the power of God above the power of men: (Luke xviii. 27.) "The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God: he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." (Eph. iii. 20. 2 Chron. xx. 6. Job ix. 4.) "According to his mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." (Phil. iii. 21. Dan. iv. 35.) Those which declare all things to be equally easy to him, and nothing difficult: "There is nothing too hard for thee." (Jer. xxxii. 17. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. 1 Sam. xiv. 6.)

4. Those which ascribe all power to him, by the titles of "Almighty, All-sufficient." (Gen. xvii. 1. Rev. iv. 8. 11; xv. 3; xvi. 7; xix. 16. Job xlii. 2.) "Thou canst do all things." (Matt. xix. 6. Mark x. 27. Luke i. 37.)

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I have dispatched what I proposed upon this argument; give me leave to apply all in the following particulars.

Use. First, The consideration of God's omnipotence may cause terror to wicked men. All this power which I have described, or rather which is so great that I cannot describe it, is engaged against sinners; "his power and his wrath is against all that forsake him:" (Ezra viii. 22.) And who knows what those words signify, (Psal. xc. 11.) "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? as is thy fear, so is thy wrath." There is no passion in the heart of man more infinite than our fear, it troubles us with jealousy and suspicion of the utmost that may happen; but when we have extended our fears to the utmost, the power of God's wrath reacheth farther. Whenever we sin, we challenge the Almighty, and dare infinite power to do its worst to us. (Job xv. 25.) Speaking of the wicked man, "He stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty." Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extremely happy or miserable for ever? "Will ye provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?" Because he doth nothing against thee for the present, thinkest thou he can do nothing? (Nah. i. 3.) "He is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not acquit the wicked." There is a day coming, when "the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."

Secondly, The consideration of God's omnipotence should check the pride and vain confidence of men. What have we to be proud of? "What have we that we have not received? Where then is cause of boasting? Who may glory in his sight?"

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Those that have the greatest power, should remember whence it is derived, and render back the glory of it to the fountain of it. (Psal. xxix. 1.) "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength." So likewise it should take men off from relying upon their own strength, which at the best is but "an arm of flesh," as the Scripture calls it, for the weakness of it. Do we not see, that many times "the battle is not to the strong?" that things are not done "by might and by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord?" When he appears against the most potent, "their hearts melt within them, and there is no more spirit left in them," as it is said of the mighty inhabitants of Canaan, (Josh. v. 1.)

Thirdly, We should make this omnipotence of God the object of our trust and confidence. This is the most proper use we can make of this doctrine, as David does in this Psalm; and this was used for a form of blessing the people in the name of God; (Psal. cxxxiv. 3.) "The Lord that made heaven and earth, bless thee." And David, when he magnifies God's deliverance of his people from the multitude of their enemies, resolves it into this, "our help standeth in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Thus did the great pattern and example of faith encourage and support his confidence in God in a very difficult trial; he staggered not at it, because "he believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that be not as though they were: therefore against hope he believed in hope," &c. (Rom. iv. 17, &c.) This gives life to all our devotion, to be persuaded that "God is able to do for us exceedingly above what we can ask or think," and that "his is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."



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I shall only caution two things, as to our reliance on the power of God.

I. Labour to be such persons, to whom God hath promised that he will engage and employ his omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good from the Almighty, we must walk before him, and be perfect, as he said to Abraham. Good men have a peculiar interest in God's power; hence he is called "the Strength of Israel," and "the mighty One of Israel." If we do what God requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his power, and exert his arm for us; but if we disobey, we must expect he will manifest his power against us, (Ez. viii. 22.) When we do well, we may "commit the keeping of our souls to him," (1 Pet. iv. 19.)

II. Our expectations from the omnipotence of God must be with submission to his pleasure, and goodness, and wisdom; we must not expect that God will manifest his power when we think there is occasion for it; but when it seems best to him, he will so employ his omnipotence, as to manifest his goodness and wisdom.

And with these two cautions, we may rely upon him in all our wants, both spiritual and temporal; for his Divine power can "give us all things that pertain to life and goodness," (2 Pet. i. 3.) We may trust him at all times, for the omnipotent God "neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; the Almighty fainteth not, neither is he weary. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

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# SERMON CLIII.

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

*God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.*—JOHN iv. 24.

THESE are the words of our Saviour to the woman of Samaria, who was speaking to him of the difference between the Samaritans and the Jews, concerning religion; (ver. 20.) "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; but ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Christ tells her, "The time was coming, when the worshippers of God should neither be confined to that mountain, nor to Jerusalem; but men should worship the Father in spirit and in truth;" when this carnal, and ceremonial, and typical worship of God, should be exalted into a more spiritual, a more real, and true, and substantial religion, which should not be confined to one temple, but should be universally diffused through the world. Now such a worship as this is most agreeable to the nature of God; for he "is a spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the words we have,

First, A proposition laid down, "God is a spirit."

Secondly, A corollary, or inference, deduced from it; "they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." I shall speak of the proposition, as that which concerns my present design;



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and afterwards speak something to the corollary, or inference, deduced from it, together with some other inferences drawn from this truth, by way of application.

First, That "God is a spirit." This expression is singular, and not to be paralleled again in the Scripture; indeed we have often mention made in the Scripture of "the Spirit of God," and the "Spirit of the Lord," which signifies a Divine power and energy; and of the Holy Spirit, signifying the third person in the Trinity; God is called "the God of the spirits of all flesh," (Num. xvi. 22; xxvii. 16.) much in the same sense as he is called "the Father of spirits;" (Heb. xii. 9.) that is, the Creator of the souls of men; but we no where meet with this expression, or any other equivalent to it, that "God is a spirit," but only in this place; nor had it been used here, but to prove, that the best worship of God, that which is most proper to him, is spiritual: so that the thing which our Saviour here intends, is not to prove the spiritual nature of God, but that his worship ought to be spiritual; nor indeed is there any necessity that it should have been any where said in Scripture, that "God is a spirit," it being the natural notion of a God; no more than it is necessary that it should be told us, that God is good, or that he is infinite, and eternal, and the like; or that the Scripture should prove to us the being of a God. All these are manifest by the light of nature; and if the Scripture mentions them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is usually in order to some farther purpose.

For we are to know that the Scripture supposeth us to be men, and to partake of the common notions of human nature, and therefore doth not teach us philosophy, nor solicitously instruct us in those

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things which are born with us; but supposeth the knowledge of these, and makes use of these common principles and notions which are in us concerning God, and the immortality of our souls, and the life to come, to excite us to our duty, and quicken our endeavours after happiness. For I do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is any where expressly delivered in Scripture, but taken for granted; in like manner, that the Scripture doth not solicitously instruct us in the natural notions which we have of God, but supposeth them known to us; and if it mention them, it is not so much in order to knowledge as to practice; and therefore we need not wonder that this expression, which doth set forth to us the nature of God, is but once used in Scripture, and that brought in upon occasion, and for another purpose, because it is a thing naturally known. Plato says, that God is ἀσώματος, "without body." In like manner, Tully: *Nec enim Deus ipse qui intelligitur a nobis alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens quædam soluta et libera; segregata ab omni concretione mortali;* "We cannot conceive of God, but as of a pure mind, entirely free from all mortal composition or mixture." And Plutarch after him, νοῦς οὖν ὁ θεὸς, χωριστὸν εἶδος τουτέστι τὸ ἀμιγὲς πάσης ὕλης, μεδενὶ πάθετῳ συμπεπλεγμένον, "God is a mind, an abstract being, pure from all matter, and disentangled from whatever is possible or capable of suffering."

So that natural light informing us that "God is a spirit," there was no need why the Scripture should inculcate this: it is an excellent medium or argument to prove that the worship of God should chiefly be spiritual; and although it was not necessary that it should have been mentioned for it-

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self; that is, to inform us of a thing which we could not otherwise know; yet the wisdom of God, by the express mention of this, seems to have provided against an error, which some weaker and grosser spirits might be subject to. You know God is pleased, by way of condescension and accommodation of himself to our capacity, to represent himself to us in Scripture by human imperfections; and gives such descriptions of himself, as if he had a body, and bodily members. Now, to prevent any error or mistake that might be occasioned hereby, it seems very becoming the wisdom of God, some where in Scripture expressly to declare the spiritual nature of God, that none through weakness or wilfulness might entertain gross apprehensions of him. In speaking to this proposition, I shall,

I. Explain what is meant by "a spirit."

II. Endeavour to prove to you that "God is a spirit."

III. Answer an objection or two.

IV. Draw some inferences or corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the notion of a spirit; I shall not trouble you with the strict philosophical notion of it, as, that it is such a substance as is penetrable; that is, may be in the same place with a body, and neither keep out the body, nor be kept out by it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided; that is, really separated and torn from one another, as the parts of a body; but I will give you a negative description of it. A spirit is not matter, it doth not fall under any of our senses, it is that which we cannot see nor touch; it is not a body, not flesh, and blood, and bones; for so we find spirit in Scripture opposed to flesh and

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body; (Isa. xxxi. 3.) "Their horses are flesh, and not spirit." So Luke xxiv. when Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, they were terrified, and supposed it had been a spirit: (ver. 39.) but he said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." The most usual description of a spirit is by these negatives; it is not a body, hath not flesh and bones, doth not consist of matter, or of any thing that falls under our senses, that we can see or touch.

II. For the proof of this proposition, that "God is a spirit." This is not to be proved by way of demonstration, for there is nothing before God, or which can be a cause of him; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most natural notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being every way perfect; and from this notion we must argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our reasonings concerning God by this; so that when any thing is said of God, the best way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to inquire whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, it belongs to him; if it be not, it is to be removed from him; and if any man ask, why I say God is so, or so, a spirit, or good, or just? the best reason that can be given, is, because these are perfections, and the contrary to these are imperfections. So that if I shew, that it would be an imperfection for God to be imagined to be a body, or matter, I prove that he is a spirit, because it is an imperfection, that is, an absurdity, to imagine him any thing else: to imagine God to be a body, or matter, doth evidently contradict four great perfections of God.

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1. His infiniteness, or the immensity of his being. Grant me but these two things, that there is something in the world besides God, some other matter, as the heavens, the air, the earth, and all those things which we see; and grant me that two bodies cannot be in the same places at once; and then it will evidently follow, that wherever these are, God is shut out; and consequently God should not be infinite, nor in all places; and so much as there is of another matter in the world besides God, so many breaches there would be in the Divine nature, so many hiatuses.

2. The knowledge and wisdom of God. It cannot be imagined how mere matter can understand, how it can distinctly comprehend such variety of objects, and at one view take in past, present, and to come. Tully, speaking of spirits, saith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest;* "Their original cannot be found upon earth; for (saith he) there is no material or bodily thing," *Quod vim memoriæ, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod et præterita teneat, et futura provideat, et complecti possit præsentia; quæ sola divina sunt,* "Which hath the power of memory, of understanding, of thought; which can retain things past, foresee things future, and comprehend things present; all which powers are purely Divine."

3. Freedom and liberty. For the laws of matter are necessary, nor can we imagine any αὐτεξούσιον, any arbitrary principle in it. This puzzled the Epicureans, as we see in Lucretius; "For if (says he) all things move by certain and necessary laws, and there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto each other, so that if you move this, that must necessarily be moved, whence (saith he) is liberty?" *Unde est hæc inquam fatis avulsa voluntas;* "Whence

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is this principle of will, whose motions are not under any law of necessity?"

4. Goodness. This follows from the former; for he is not good who does not know what he does, nor does it freely; so that take away understanding and liberty, and you take away goodness: now take away from God infiniteness, and knowledge, and liberty, and goodness, and you divest him of his glory; you take away his most essential perfections. So that these great absurdities following from the supposing of God to be mere matter or body, we are to conceive of him as another kind of substance; that is, a spirit. So that I wonder that the author of the Leviathan, who doth more than once expressly affirm, that there can be nothing in the world but what is material and corporeal, did not see that the necessary consequence of this position is to banish God out of the world. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt he did see it, and was content with the consequence, and willing the world should entertain it: for it is so evident, that, by supposing the Divine essence to consist of matter, the immensity of the Divine nature is taken away; and it is also so utterly unimaginable how mere matter should understand, and be endowed with liberty, and consequently with goodness, that I cannot but vehemently suspect the man who denies God to be a spirit, either to have a gross and faulty understanding, or a very ill will against God, and an evil design to root out of the minds of men the belief of a God. I come in the

III. Third place, to consider the objections.

1st Obj.—Why then is God represented to us so often in Scripture by the parts and members of men's bodies? Answ. I shall only say, at present, that

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all these descriptions and representations of God are plainly made to comply with our weakness, by way of condescension and accommodation to our capacities.

2d Obj.—How is it said, that "man was made after the image of God," if God be a spirit, of which there can be no likeness nor resemblance? Answ. Man is not said to be made after the image of God, in respect of the outward shape and features of his body, but in respect of the qualities of his mind, as holiness and righteousness; or of his faculties, as understanding and will; or, which the text seems most to favour, in respect of his dominion and sovereignty over the creatures; for, in the two former respects, the angels are made after the image of God. Now, this seems to be spoken peculiarly of men, (Gen. i. 24.) "Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air," &c.

IV. I come now to draw some inferences or corollaries from hence, and they shall be partly speculative, partly practical.

First, Speculative inferences.

1. That God is invisible. The proper object of sight is colour, and that ariseth from the various dispositions of the parts of matter which cause several reflections of light. Now, a spirit hath no parts nor matter, and therefore is invisible. (1 Tim. i. 17.) "Unto the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." (Heb. xi. 27.) "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible;" as seeing him by an eye of faith, who is invisible by an eye of sense. (1 Tim. vi. 16.) "Whom no man hath seen, nor can see."

When Moses, and the elders of Israel, are said to have seen God, and Jacob to have seen him face

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to face, (Exod. ii. 6. Gen. xxxii. 30.) it is meant of an angel covered with Divine glory and majesty; as we shall see if we compare these with other texts. When Moses is said to have "spoken to him face to face," that is, familiarly; and so Micaiah (1 Kings xxii. 19.) is said to have "seen God upon his throne, and all Israel scattered up and down;" this was in a vision. And it is promised, that in heaven we shall see God; that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him, and full enjoyment; as, to see good days, is to enjoy them. Those texts, where it is said, "No man can see God and live," (Exod. xxxiii. 20. and John i. 18.) "No man hath seen God at any time," do not intimate that God is visible, though we cannot see him; but *seeing* is metaphorically used for *knowing*, and the meaning is, that in this life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of God. A clear discovery of God to our understanding would let in joys into our souls, and create desires in us, too great for frail mortality to bear.

2. That he is the living God; spirit and life are often put together in Scripture.

3. That God is immortal. This the Scripture attributes to him, (1 Tim. i. 17.) "To the King immortal, invisible." (1 Tim. vi. 16.) "Who only hath immortality." This also flows from God's spirituality; a spiritual nature hath no principles of corruption in it, nothing that is liable to perish, or decay, or die. Now this doth so eminently agree to God, either because he is purely spiritual and immaterial, as possibly no creature is; or else because he is not only immortal in his own nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, because he hath an original and independent immortality; and therefore the apostle doth attribute it to

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him in such a singular and peculiar manner, "who only hath immortality."

Secondly, Practical inferences.

1. We are not to conceive of God as having a body, or any corporeal shape or members. This was the gross conceit of the Anthropomorphites of old, and of some Socinians of late, which they ground upon the gross and literal interpretation of many figurative speeches in Scripture concerning God, as where it speaks of his face, and hand, and arm, &c. But we are very unthankful to God, who condescends to represent himself to us according to our capacities, if we abuse this condescension to the blemish and reproach of the Divine nature. If God be pleased to stoop to our weakness, we must not therefore level him to our infirmities.

2. If God be a spirit, we are not to worship God by any image or sensible representation. Because God is a spirit, we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to represent him by "the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above," that is, of any birds; "or in the earth beneath," that is, of any beast; "or in the waters under the earth," that is, of any fish; as it is in the second commandment. For, as the prophet tells us, there is nothing that we can liken God to; (Isa. xl. 18.) "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare to him?" We debase his spiritual and incorruptible nature, when we compare him to corruptible creatures. (Rom. i. 22, 23.) Speaking of the heathen idolatry, "Who, professing themselves wise, became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things." They became fools; this is the folly of

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idolatry, to liken a spirit, which hath no bodily shape, to things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that, however some are pleased to mince the matter, I cannot see how the church of Rome, which worships God by or towards some image or sensible representation, can be excused from idolatry; and the church of England doth not, without very just cause, challenge the Romish church with it, and make it a ground of separation from her.

3. If God be a spirit, then we should "worship him in spirit and in truth." This is the inference of the text; and, therefore, I shall speak a little more largely of it; only I must explain what is meant by worshipping "in spirit and in truth," and shew you the force of this consequence, how it follows, that because God is a spirit, therefore he must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth."

1. For the explication of it. This word spirit is sometimes applied to the doctrine of the gospel, and so it is opposed to letter, by which name the doctrine of Moses is called, (2 Cor. iii. 6.) "Who hath made us able ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit;" not of the law, which was written in tables of stone, but which Christ by his Spirit writes in the hearts of believers. Sometimes to the worship of the gospel; and so it is opposed to the flesh: (Gal. iii. 3.) "Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" that is, by the works of the ceremonial law, which is therefore called flesh, because the principal ceremony of it, circumcision, was made in the flesh, and because their sacrifices, a chief part of their worship, were of the flesh of beasts; and because the greatest part of their ordinances, as washing, and the like, related to the body. Hence it is the apostle calls the worship of the Jews, "the law of a carnal com-

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mandment," (Heb. vii. 16. and Heb. ix 10.) Carnal ordinances, speaking of the service of the law, "which (saith he) stood in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances." Now, in opposition to this carnal and ceremonial worship, we are to worship God "in the spirit." The worship of the Jews was most a bodily service; but we are to give God a reasonable service, to serve him with the spirit of our minds, as the apostle speaks; instead of offering the flesh of bulls and goats, we are to consecrate ourselves to the service of God: "this is a holy and acceptable sacrifice," or reasonable service.

"And in truth." Either in opposition to the false worship of the Samaritans (as "in spirit" is opposed to the worship of the Jews), as our Saviour tells the woman, that "they worshipped they knew not what;" or (which I rather think) in opposition to the shadows of the law; and so it is opposed, (John i. 17.) "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Not that the external service of God is here excluded, not that we are to shew no outward reverence to him; but that, as, under the law, the service of God was chiefly external and corporeal, so now it should chiefly be inward and spiritual; the worship of God, under the gospel, should chiefly be spiritual and substantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious devotion.

2dly, For the force of the consequence, it doth not lie in this, that just such as God is, such must our worship of him be; for this would exclude all bodily and outward worship; our worship of God must therefore be invisible, eternal, &c. for so is he; and besides, the will of God seems rather to be the rule of his worship than his nature: but the force

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of it is this; God is of a spiritual nature, and this is to be supposed to be his will, that our worship should be as agreeable to the object of it, as the nature of the creature, who is to give it, will bear. Now, saith Christ to the woman, the Jews and the Samaritans limit their worship to a certain place, and it consists chiefly in certain carnal rites and ordinances; but, saith he, though God have permitted this for a time, because of the carnality and hardness of their hearts, yet the time is coming, when a more spiritual, and solid, and substantial worship of God is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular places and rites; not tied to the temple, or to such external ceremonies, but consisting in the devotion of our spirits, even the inward frame and temper of our hearts; all outward circumstances (excepting those of the two sacraments which are positive) being left by the gospel to as great a liberty, as natural necessity and decency will permit.

We must worship God, and therefore it is naturally necessary that we should do it somewhere, in some place; now seeing somebody must determine this, it is most convenient that authority should determine it according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We must not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally indecent in the worship of God: this authority should restrain; but farther than this, I doubt not but the gospel hath left us free; and to this end, that the less we are tied to external observances, the more intent we should be upon the spiritual and substantial parts of religion, the conforming of ourselves to the mind and will of God, endeavouring to be like unto God, and to have our souls and spirits engaged in those duties we perform to him. So that our Saviour's argument is this;

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"God is a spirit;" that is, the most excellent nature and being, and therefore must be served with the best. We consist of body and soul, it is true, and we must serve him with our whole man, but principally with our souls, which are the most excellent part of ourselves; the service of our mind and spirit is the best we can perform, and therefore most agreeable to God, who is a spirit, and the best and most perfect being.

So that the inference is this, that if God be a spirit, we must "worship him in spirit and in truth;" our religion must be real, and inward, and sincere, and substantial: we must not think to put off God with external observances, and with bodily reverence and attendance; this we must give him, but we must principally regard that our service of him be reasonable, that is, directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our affections. Our religion must consist principally in a sincere love and affection to God, which expresseth itself in a real conformity of our lives and actions to his will; and when we make our solemn approaches to him, in the duties of his worship and service, we must perform all acts of outward worship to God with a pure and sincere mind; whatever we do in the service of God, we must "do it heartily as to the Lord." God is a pure spirit, present to our spirits, intimate to our souls, and conscious to the most secret and retired motions of our hearts: now because we serve the Searcher of hearts, we must serve him with our hearts.

Indeed, if we did worship God only to be seen of men, a pompous and external worship would be very suitable to such an end; but religion is not intended to please men, but God; and therefore it must be spiritual, and inward, and real.

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And wherever the external part of religion is principally regarded, and men are more careful to worship God with outward pomp and ceremony, than in "spirit and in truth," religion degenerates into superstition, and men embrace the shadow of religion, and let go the substance. And this the church of Rome hath done almost to the utter ruin of Christianity: she hath clogged religion and the worship of God with so many rites and ceremonies, under one pretence or other, that the yoke of Christ is become heavier than that of Moses; and they have made the gospel a more carnal commandment than the law; and whatever Christians or churches are intent upon external rites and observances, to the neglect of the weightier parts of religion, regarding meats and drinks, &c. to the prejudice of righteousness and peace, wherein the kingdom of God consists, they advance a religion as contrary to the nature of God, and as unsuitable to the genius and temper of the gospel, as can be imagined.

It is an observation of Sir Edwin Sands, that, as children are pleased with toys, so (saith he,) it is a pitiful and childish spirit that is predominant in the contrivers and zealots of a ceremonious religion. I deny not, but that very honest and devout men may be this way addicted; but the wiser any man is, the better he understands the nature of God and of religion, the farther he will be from this temper.

A religion that consists in external and little things, doth most easily gain upon and possess the weakest minds; and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their spirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent duties of Christianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity; and if we let out much of it upon small things, there will



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be too little left for those parts of religion which are of greatest moment and concernment; if our heat evaporate in externals, the heart and vitals of religion will insensibly cool and decline.

How should we blush, who are Christians, that we have not learned this easy truth from the gospel, which even the light of nature taught the heathen? *Cultus autem deorum est optimus itemque sanctissimus atque castissimus, plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper pura integra et incorrupti mente et voce veneremur.*— Tully. "The best, the surest, the most chaste, and most devout worship of the gods, is that which is paid them with a pure, sincere, and uncorrupt mind, and words truly representing the thoughts of the heart." *Compositum jus fasque animi*, &c. "Serve God with a pure, honest, holy frame of spirit; bring him a heart that is but generously honest, and he will accept of the plainest sacrifice."

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious worship of the Jews was never a thing in itself acceptable to God, of which he did delight in; and though God was pleased with their obedience to the ceremonial law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not desire it; but that which our Saviour saith concerning the law of divorce, is true likewise of the ceremonial, that it was permitted to the Jews "for the hardness of their hearts," and for their proneness to idolatry. God did not command it so much by way of approbation, as by way of condescension to their weakness; it was because of "the hardness of their carnal hearts," that God brought them under "the law of a carnal commandment," as the apostle calls it. (See Psal. li. 16, 17. Jer. vii. 21.)

The reason why I have insisted so long upon this, is, to let you understand what is the true nature of

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Christ's religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which men are apt to have for external and indifferent things in religion. The sacrifices and rites of the Jews, were very disagreeable and unsuitable to the nature of God. (Psal. l. 13.) "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" Spirits neither eat nor drink; it was a very unsuitable way of service to kill oxen and sheep for God; and there is the same reason of all other rites, which either natural necessity or decency doth not require. Can any man in earnest think that God, who is a spirit, is pleased with the pompous bravery and pageantry which affects our senses? So little doth God value indifferent rites, that even the necessary external service of God, and outward reverence, where they are separated from spirit and truth, from real holiness and obedience to the indispensable laws of Christ, are so far from being acceptable to God, that they are abominable; nay, if they be used for a cloak of sin, or in opposition to real religion, and with a design to undermine it, God accounts such service in the number of the most heinous sins.

You, who spend the strength and vigour of your spirits about external things, whose zeal for or against ceremonies is ready to eat you up; you, who hate and persecute one another because of these things, and break the necessary and indispensable commands of love, as an indifferent and unnecessary ceremony, "Go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," which our Saviour doth so often inculcate, and that (Rom. xiv. 17.) "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink," &c. And study the meaning of this, "God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."



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# SERMON CLIV.

## THE IMMENSITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*—PSALM CXXXIX. 7—10.

THAT attribute of God which I last discoursed of is most absolute, and declares his essence most immediately—the spirituality of the Divine nature. I shall, in the next place, speak of those which relate to the manner of his being, immensity and eternity; that is, the infiniteness of his essence, both in respect of space and duration; that the Divine nature hath no limits of its being, nor bounds of its duration. I shall at the present speak to the first of these, his immensity, and that from these words which I here read to you, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit," &c. The meaning of which is this, that God is a spirit infinitely diffusing himself, present in all places, so that wherever I go, God is there; we cannot flee from his presence. "If I ascend into heaven, he is there; if I go down into the grave," the place of silence and obscurity, "he is there; (for that is the meaning of the expression, 'if I make my bed in hell;') if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand

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shall hold me;" that is, if my motion should be as swift as that of the light, which, when the sun riseth, darts itself in an instant from one part of the world to another, over the earth and the sea, the remotest parts of the world which are unknown to us, yet would God be present to me in the motion, and all along as I go must I be led and upholden by him; so that all these expressions do but signify to us the immensity of God's essence, that his being is infinitely diffused and present in all places.

In speaking to this attribute of God's immensity, I shall, first, explain it to you a little.

Secondly, Prove that it doth belong to him.

Thirdly, Answer an objection or two that may be made against it.

Fourthly, Draw some doctrinal inferences from it.

Fifthly, Make some use and improvement of it.

First, For the explication of it. By the immensity of God, I mean, that his being hath no bounds or limits, but doth every way spread and diffuse itself beyond what we can imagine; so that you cannot define the presence of God by any certain place, so as to say, Here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, so as to say, Thus far his being reacheth, and no farther; but he is every where present, after a most infinite manner, in the darkest corners and most private recesses; the most secret closet that is in the whole world, the heart of man, darkness and privacy cannot keep him out; the presence of another being, even of a body, which is the grossest substance, doth not exclude him; the whole world doth not confine him; but he fills all the space which we can imagine beyond this visible world, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Secondly, For the proof of it, I shall attempt it,

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I. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds.

II. From Scripture and Divine revelation.

III. From the inconvenience of the contrary.

I. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds. We find that the heathen, by the light of nature, did attribute this perfection to God. Tully tells us, De Nat. Deor. that Pythagoras thought, *Deum esse animam per naturam rerum omnem intentum et comeantem;* "That God is, as it were, a soul passing through and inspiring all nature." And in l. 2. de Leg. that this was Thales's opinion which he commends, *Homines existimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia esse plena;* "That men ought to believe, that the gods see all things, that all things are full of them." So Sen. Epist. 95. *Ubique et omnibus præsto est;* "He is every where present and at hand:" and, de Benef. l. 4. *Quocunque te flexeris ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi, nihil ab illo vacat; opus suum ipse implet;* "Which way soever thou turnest thyself, thou shalt find him meeting thee; nothing is without him, he fills his own work." Not much differing from the expression of the Psalmist here.

II. From Scripture and Divine revelation. I shall instance in some remarkable places: (1 Kings viii. 27.) "Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee." (Job xi. 7—9.) "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Isa. lxvi. 1.) "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.) "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any

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hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" (Amos ix. 2, 3.) "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent and he shall bite them." (Acts xvii. 27, 28.) "Though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

III. From the inconveniences of the contrary. And this is the most proper way of proving any of God's perfections; for, as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before God, nor any cause of his being, his perfections cannot be proved by way of demonstration, but of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most easy notion that we have of God is, that he is a being which hath all perfection, and is free from all imperfections. Now if I prove that the immensity of God's essence is a perfection, or, which is the same, that the contrary is an imperfection, I do sufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to suppose the Divine essence to be limited or confined, and his presence to be any where excluded, doth contradict both this necessary perfection of God, his universal providence; and the necessary duty of creatures, to worship and trust in him; and the voluntary manifestation and appearance of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

1. It contradicts the universal providence of God.

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The universal providence of God supposeth many perfections; viz. infinite knowledge and infinite power, his omniscience and omnipotence, neither of which can be imagined without omnipresence. We find that all finite beings have a finite knowledge and a finite power; and it cannot be conceived how infinite understanding and power can be founded any where else than in an infinite essence. To have an infinite knowledge of all things, even those things which are most secret and hidden, to be able to do all things, to steer and govern the actions of all creatures, and to have a perfect care of them, seems, to all the reason of mankind, to require immediate presence.

2. It contradicts the necessary duty of the creature, which is to worship God, to depend upon him for every thing, and in every thing to acknowledge him. Now all worship of God is rendered vain, or at least uncertain, if God be not present to us to hear our prayers, to take notice of our wants, and receive our acknowledgments: it will much abate our confidence in God, and our fear to offend him, if we be uncertain whether he be present to us or not, whether he sees our actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary manifestation and appearance of God in the incarnation of Christ. He that supposeth God not to be every where present by his essence, must, in all reason, confine his presence to heaven, and suppose him to be present elsewhere only by his virtue and power: but if this were so, how could the Divinity be essentially united to the human nature of Christ which was here upon earth? how "is God with us?" How does "he pitch his tabernacle amongst men," if his essential presence be confined to heaven?

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Thirdly, I come to answer objections against this doctrine.

There are two objections against this:

1. From reason.

2. From Scripture.

1st Obj.—Reason will be ready to suggest, that this is a disparagement to the Divine nature, to tie his presence to this vile dunghill of the earth, and sordid sink of hell. This is a gross apprehension of God, and a measuring of him by ourselves. Indeed if we look upon God as capable of injury, and suffering, and offence, from the contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then, indeed, there were some strength in this objection: but he is a blessed and pure Being: *Mens segregata ab omni concretione mortali*; "A mind free from all mortal composition or mixture."—Tully. Μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, "Disentangled from every thing passable," as Plutarch. Those things that are nauseous to our senses do not affect him. Darkness is uncomfortable to us; but "the darkness and the light are all one to him." Wickedness may "hurt a man, or the son of man;" but "if we multiply our transgressions, we do nothing to God," as Elihu speaks, (Job xxxv. 6.) Nothing can disquiet or discompose his happy and blessed nature, but he converseth here in this dark and troubled world with less danger or disturbance, or any impure contagion, than the sun-beams.

2d Obj.—Does not the Scripture tell us, that "God sits in the heavens," and "dwells on high;" that "heaven is his throne," and that "it is the city of the great God?" Doth not the Lord's Prayer teach us to say, "Our Father, which art in heaven?" Is he not said to "look down from heaven," and

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to "hear in heaven, his dwelling-place?" Is it not said, that "he doth not dwell in temples made with hands?" And does not Solomon, (1 Kings viii. 27.) put it as a strange question, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth?" Is he not said to come down and "draw near to us," and to be "afar off from us?" Now how does this agree with his immensity and omnipresence?

For answer to this, I must distinguish the presence of God. There is, first, his glorious presence; that is, such a presence of God as is accompanied with an extraordinary manifestation of his glory, and that is especially and chiefly confined to heaven, in respect of which it is called his seat, and throne, and "the habitation of his glory." Some degree of this was in the temple, which is the reason of Solomon's admiration, "Will God indeed dwell on earth?"

Secondly, There is his gracious presence, which discovers itself by miraculous effects of his favour, and goodness, and assistance, and thereby he is said to "dwell in the hearts of good men, and with them that are of a humble and contrite spirit;" (Isa. lvii. 15.) and, in respect of this, he is said to "draw near to us," to "look down upon us;" and, in respect of the absence of this, to be "far from us."

Thirdly, There is his essential presence, which is equally and alike in all places; and this is not excluded by those former expressions, which the Scripture useth to denote to us the glorious and gracious presence of God.

Fourthly, To make some inferences. I will mention only such as the Scripture here takes notice of, speaking of God's immensity.

I. Inf.—That God is a spirit. This necessarily

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flows from his immensity; for if the essence of God be every where diffused, the Divine nature must be spiritual, otherwise it could not be in the same place where body and matter is, but must be shut out of the world. But this I spoke more largely to in my discourse of God's being a spirit. This the Psalmist observes here, "Where shall I go from thy Spirit?" If he were not a spirit, we might go from him, and hide ourselves from his presence.

II. Inf.—That God is incomprehensible. That which is infinite cannot be measured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this, also, the Psalmist takes notice of, in the verse before my text, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it."

III. Inf.—That God is omniscient. If God be every where, then he knows all things; yea, even the hidden things of darkness, the secrets of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from an infinite eye; he is present to our thoughts, intimate to our hearts and reins: this the Psalmist takes notice of, 1—4, and 12th verses.

IV. Inf.—That God is omnipotent. He can do all things. Distance limits the power of creatures, and makes their hands short; but God is every where, nothing is out of his reach; and this, also, the Psalmist intimates in the text, (ver. 10.) "Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me."

Fifthly, The use and improvement I shall make of this, shall be,

1. To awaken our fear of him.

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him.

1. To awaken our fear of him. The consideration of God's presence should awaken in us a fear

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of reverence. The presence of an earthly majesty will awe our spirits, and compose us to reverence; yea, the presence of a wise and good man; how much more should the presence of the great, and glorious, the wise, and the holy, and the just God, strike awe upon our spirits? Wherever we are, God is with us; we always converse with him, and live continually in his presence. Now a heathen could say, *Cum diis verecunde agendum*, "We must behave ourselves modestly, because we are in the presence of God."

And it should awaken in us a fear to offend God, and a fear of the Divine displeasure for having offended him. Fear is the most wakeful passion in the soul of man, and is the first principle that is wrought upon in us from the apprehensions of a Deity; it flows immediately from the principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man's nature; we have a natural dread and horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our being or happiness. Now the greatest danger is from the greatest power, for where we are clearly over-matched, we cannot hope to make opposition nor resistance with security and success, to rebel with safety: now he that apprehends God to be near him, and present to him, believes such a Being to stand by him as is possessed of an infinite and irresistible power, and will vindicate all contempt of the Divine Majesty, and violation of his laws. If we believe God to be always present with us, "fear will continually take hold of us," and we shall say of every place, as Jacob did of Bethel, "Surely God is in this place, how dreadful is this place!" When we have at any time provoked God, if we believe the just God is at hand to revenge himself, and

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if we believe the power of his anger, we shall say with David, (Psal. lxxvi. 7.) "Thou, even thou, art to be feared, and who may stand before thee when thou art angry?" (Psal. cxix. 120.) "My flesh trembleth because of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments."

Sinners, consider this, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;" and every time you sin, you are within his reach. Let, then, the consideration of God's presence deter us from sin, and quicken us to our duty. The eye and presence of a superior will lay a great restraint upon men; the eye of our prince, our master, or our father, will make us afraid or ashamed to do any thing that is foolish or unseemly: and will we do that under the eye of God, which we should blush to do before a grave or wise person, yea, before a child or a fool? Did but men live under this apprehension, that God is present to them, that a holy and all-seeing eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked, to profane and pollute God's glorious name, by a trifling use of it in customary swearing and cursing. Whenever you sin, you affront God to his face, and provoke omnipotent justice, which is at the door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the consideration of this should especially deter us from secret sins. This is the use the Psalmist here makes of it. If we believe that God searcheth us and knows us; that he knows our down-sitting and our up-rising, and understands our thoughts afar off; that he compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways; that there is not a word in our tongue but he knows it altogether; that he hath beset us behind and before; that the darkness hideth not from

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him, but the night shineth as the day, and the darkness and light are both alike: I say, if we believe this, how should we live in an awful sense of the Majesty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inseparable from us, as we are from ourselves, whose eye is upon us from the beginning of our lives to the end of our days! Did men believe that God is always with them, that his eye pierceth the darkness, and sees through all those clouds with which they hide and muffle themselves, and pries into the most secret recesses of their hearts: how would this check and restrain them from "devising mischief in their hearts, or in their bed-chamber!" The holy presence, and the pure eye of God, would be to us a thousand times more than to have our father, or our master, or our prince, or him whom we most revere, to stand by us. Did but men *repræsentare sibi Deum*, "make God present to them," by living under a continual sense of his presence, they would, as the expression of the wise man is, "be in the fear of the Lord all day." *Magna spes peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis adsistat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus auctoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius facit;* "The main hope of sinners is to remain undiscovered; let but somebody be privy to their designs, and they are utterly disappointed: it is fit for the mind of a man to have an awe of some being, whose authority may render even its privacy more solemn." This is the character of wicked men; (Psal. lxxxvi. 14.) "That they have not God before their eyes." One great cause of all the wickedness, and violence, and looseness, that is upon the earth, is, they do not believe that God is near them and stands by them.

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And as the consideration of God's presence should deter us from sin, so it should quicken and animate us to our duty. It is ordinarily a great encouragement to men to acquit themselves handsomely, to have the eyes of men upon them, especially of those whose applause and approbation they value. God alone is *amplum theatrum*, he is "a greater theatre" than the world; and it should be more to us that he stands by us, than if the eyes of all the world were fixed upon us. Seneca adviseth it, as an excellent means to promote virtue, to propound to ourselves, and set before our eyes, some eminently virtuous person, as Cato or Lælius, *Ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus, et omnia tanquam illo vidente faciamus:* "That we may live just as if he were looking upon us, and do all things just as if he beheld us." How much greater incitement will it be to us, to think that God looks upon us, and sees us, and really stands by us, than faintly to imagine the presence of Lælius or Cato?

This should have an influence upon all the duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who stands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. This Cicero, in l. 2. de Leg. looks upon as a great principle of religion: *Sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, et qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, qua mente, qua pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, et piorum impiorumque rationem habere*: "Let men be thoroughly persuaded of this, that the gods observe both the disposition and the actions of every particular man, what he consents to, what he allows himself in, particularly with what meaning, with what degree of inward devotion, he

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performs his religious worship; and that they distinguish between the pious and the impious."

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him. When we are in straits, and difficulties, and dangers, God is with us; when trouble is near to us, God is not far from us; wherever we are, how remote soever from friends and companions, we cannot be banished from God's presence; if we dwell "beyond the utmost parts of the sea, there his hand leads us, and his right hand holds us." (Psal. xvi. 8.) "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." The consideration of God's presence is the great stay and support of our faith. (Psal. xlvi. 1, 2.) "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." In the greatest commotions, and the most imminent and threatening dangers, this should charm and allay our fears, that God is a present help.

This was the support of Moses's faith in his sufferings, as the apostle tells us, (Heb. xi. 27.) "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

To conclude all: whenever we are under any pressure or trouble, we should rebuke our own fears, and challenge our anxious thoughts with David, (Psal. xlii. 11.) "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? trust still in God;" believe that God is with thee, and that omnipotent goodness stands by thee, who can and will support thee, and relieve thee, and deliver thee, when it seems best to his wisdom.

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# SERMON CLV.

## THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*—PSALM XC. 2.

THE immensity and eternity of God, are those attributes which relate to his nature, or manner of being. Having spoken of the former, I proceed to consider the latter, from these words.

The title of this Psalm is, "the prayer of Moses, the man of God." He begins his prayer with the acknowledgment of God's providence to his people from the beginning of the world; "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place from all generations:" "in generation and generation;" so the Hebrew. He was well acquainted with the history of the world, and the providence of God from the beginning of it; and, as if he had spoken too little of God, in saying, that his providence had been exercised in all the ages of the world, he tells us here in the text, that he was before the world, and he made it; he was from all eternity, and should continue to all eternity the same. "Before the mountains were brought forth," the most firm and durable parts of the world, the most eminent and conspicuous; "or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world," before any thing was created; "from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." In speaking of this attribute, I shall,

First, Give you the explication of it.



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Secondly, Endeavour to prove that it doth belong to God, and ought to be attributed to the Divine nature.

Thirdly, Draw some corollaries from the whole.

First, For the explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits: now there are two limits of duration, beginning and ending; that which hath always been, is without beginning; that which always shall be, is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing always to have been, and the continuance of its being now to cease, though there be no such thing in the world: and there are some things which have had a beginning of their being, but shall have no end, shall always continue, as the angels and spirits of men. The first of these the schoolmen call eternity *a parteante*; that is, "duration without beginning;" the latter, eternity *a parte post*, "a duration without ending." But eternity, absolutely taken, comprehends both these, and signifies an infinite duration, which had no beginning, nor shall have any end: so that when we say God is eternal, we mean that he always was, and shall be for ever; that he had no beginning of life, nor shall have any end of days; but that he is "from everlasting to everlasting," as it is here in the text.

It is true, indeed, that as to God's eternity *a parte ante*, as to his having always been, the Scripture doth not give us any solicitous account of it; it only tells us, in general, that God was before the world was, and that he created it: it doth not descend to gratify our curiosity, in giving us any account of what God did before he made the world, or how he entertained himself from all eternity: it doth not give us any distinct account of his infinite duration;

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for that had been impossible for our finite understandings to comprehend; if we should have ascended upward millions of ages, yet we should never have ascended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of infinity; therefore the Scripture, which was wrote to instruct us in what was necessary, and not to satisfy our curiosity, tells us this, that God was from everlasting, before the world was made, and that he laid the foundations of it.

So that, by the eternity of God, you are to understand the perpetual continuance of his being, without beginning or ending.

I shall not trouble you with the inconsistent and unintelligible notions of the schoolmen; that it is *duratio tota simul*, in which we are not to conceive any succession, but to imagine it an instant. We may as well conceive the immensity of God to be a point, as his eternity to be an instant: and as, according to our manner of conceiving, we must necessarily suppose the immensity of God to be an infinite expansion of his essence, a presence of it to all places, and imaginable space; so must we suppose the eternity of God to be a perpetual continuance, co-existent to all imaginable succession of ages. Now, how that can be together, which must necessarily be imagined to be co-existent to successions—let them that can, conceive.

Secondly, For the proof of this, I shall attempt it two ways.

I. From the dictates of natural light and reason.

II. From Scripture and Divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural reason. This attribute of God is of all others least disputed among the philosophers: indeed, all agree that God is a perfect and happy being; but wherein that happi-



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ness and perfection consists, they differ exceedingly; but all agree, that God is eternal, and are agreed what eternity is; viz. a boundless duration: and however they did attribute a beginning to their heroes and demons, whence come the genealogies of their gods, yet the Supreme God they looked upon as without beginning: and it is a good evidence, that this perfection doth clearly belong to God, that Epicurus, who had the lowest and meanest conceptions of God, and robbed him of as many perfections as his imperfect reason would let him, yet is forced to attribute this to him: Tully (de Nat. Deor. lib. 1.) saith to the Epicureans, *Ubi igitur vestrum beatum et æternum quibus duobus verbis significatis Deum?* "Where then is your happy and eternal being, by which two epithets you express God?" And Lucretius, who hath undertaken to represent to the world the doctrine of Epicurus, gives this account of the Divine nature:

*Omnis enim per se divum natura necesse est*
*Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur:*

"It is absolutely necessary to the nature of the gods, to pass an eternity in profound peace and quiet."

The poets, who had the wildest notions of God, yet they constantly give them the title of ἀθάνατοι; the heathen never mention the name of God, without this attribute; *Dii immortales!* "Immortal gods!" was their ordinary exclamation; and they swear constantly by this attribute, *Deos testor immortales;* and to mention no more, Tully saith expressly, *Nos Deum nisi sempiternum intelligere qui possumus?* "How can we conceive of God, but as an eternal Being."

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Now, the reason of this is evident, because it would be the greatest imperfection we could attribute to his being; and the more perfect his being were otherwise, the greater imperfection would it be for such a being to die; so excellent a nature to cease to be; it would be an infinite abasement to all his other perfections, his power, and wisdom, and goodness, that these should all be perishing; nay, it would hinder several of his perfections, and contradict their very being: his self-existence; had he not always been, he had not been of himself: his necessary existence; for that is not necessarily, which may at any time not be, or cease to be what it is: and it would much abate the duty of the creature; we could not have that assurance of his promise, and that security of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his being, who should be the dispenser of them, were uncertain.

Now, these absurdities and inconveniences following from the denial of this perfection to God, is sufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the perfections of God cannot be proved by way of demonstration, but only by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary.

II. From Scripture and Divine revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpose, which speak of the eternity of God directly, and by consequence: by consequence those words, (2 Pet. iii. 8.) "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day;" which words, however interpreters have troubled themselves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this—that such is the infinite duration of God, that all measures of time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain

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meaning appears by Psal. xc. out of which they are cited; "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night;" that is, as the time past, as a few hours slept away, for that is the meaning of "a watch in the night," that is as nothing. Now, St. Peter's conversion of the words, "One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," only signifies this, that the longest duration of time is so inconsiderable to God, that it is as the shortest; that is, bears no proportion to the eternity of God.

But directly, the Scripture frequently mentions this attribute: he is called the "everlasting God," (Gen. xxi. 33.) "The eternal God," (Deut. xxxiii. 27.) and, which is to the same purpose, "he that inhabiteth eternity," (Isa. lvii. 15.) And this, as it is attributed to him in respect of his being, so in respect of all his other perfections, (Psal. ciii. 17.) "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." (Rom. i. 20.) "His eternal power." (1 Tim. i. 17.) "The King eternal." Those doxologies which the Scripture useth, are but acknowledgments of this attribute: "Blessed be the Lord for ever and ever," (Neh. ix. 5.) "To whom be glory, and honour, and dominion for ever and ever," (Gal. i. 5.) and in many other places.

Hither we may refer all those places which speak of him as without beginning; (Psal. xciii. 2.) "Thou art from everlasting." (Mciah v. 2.) "Whose goings forth have been from everlasting." (Hab. i. 12.) "Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord?" And those which speak of the perpetual continuance of his duration, (Psal. cii. 24—27.) "Thy years are throughout all generations; of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are

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the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."

And those which speak of him "as the first and the last." (Isa. xliii. 10.) "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me. I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God." And to mention no more, those which speak of his being, as co-existent to all difference of time, past, present, and to come: (Rev. i. 8.) "I am Alpha, and Omega, the beginning, and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come."

Thirdly, I shall from hence draw,

I. Some doctrinal corollaries.

II. Some practical inferences.

I. Doctrinal corollaries, that you may see how the perfections of God depend one upon another, and may be deduced one from another.

1st Corol.—From the eternity of God, we may infer, that he is of himself. That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a cause of its being.

2d Corol.—We may hence infer the necessity of his being. It is necessary every thing should be, when it is; now that which is always is absolutely necessary, because always so.

3d Corol.—The immutability of the Divine nature; for being always, he is necessarily; and being necessarily, he cannot but be what he is; a change of his being, is as impossible as a cessation. Therefore the Psalmist puts his immutability and eternity together: (Psal. cii. 27.) "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."

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II. By way of practical inference or application.

1. The consideration of God's eternity may serve for the support of our faith. This Moses here useth as a ground of his faith; "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations; before the mountains were brought forth," &c. (Psal. lxii. 8.) "Trust in him at all times, ye people." His immensity is an argument why all should trust in him, he is a present help to all; and why they should trust in him at all times, his eternity is an argument, (Deut. xxxiii. 27.) "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." There are two attributes which are the proper objects of our faith and confidence—God's goodness, and his power; both these are eternal: "The goodness of the Lord endureth for ever," as it is frequently in the Psalms. And his power is eternal: the apostle speaks of his eternal power, as well as Godhead, (Rom. i. 20. Isa. xxvi. 4.) "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." (Isa. xl. 28.) "The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary."

We cannot trust in men, because there is nothing in man to be a foundation of our confidence; his good-will towards us may change, his power may faint, and he may grow weary; or if these continue, yet they that have a mind and a power to help us, themselves may fail: therefore the Psalmist useth this consideration of men's mortality, to take us off from confidence in man, (Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4.) "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish." (Isa. ii. 22.) "Cease ye from man,

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whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" The greatest of the sons of men are but lying refuges to the everlasting God; they are but broken reeds to the rock of ages.

And this may support our faith, not only in reference to our own condition for the future, but in reference to our posterity, and the condition of God's church to the end of the world. When we die, we may leave ours and the church in his hands, who lives for ever, and reigns for ever. The enemies of God's church, and those who have the most malicious designs against it, whatever share they may have in the affairs of the world, they can but domineer for a while, they must die, and "that very day their thoughts perish:" "But thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."

2. For the encouragement of our obedience. We serve the God who can give us an everlasting reward. The reward of the next life is called "eternal life, an eternal weight of glory," (2 Cor. iv. 17.) "Eternal salvation," (Heb. v. 9.) "An eternal inheritance," (Heb. ix. 15.) That place where good men shall be rewarded, is called "everlasting habitations," (Luke xvi. 9.) "A house eternal in the heavens," (2 Cor. v. 1.) As the promise of our future reward is founded in the goodness of God, and the greatness of it in his power, so the duration of it in his eternity. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we serve him, and suffer for him, who lives for ever, and will make us happy for ever? When we serve the great men of this world, though we be secure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; and this discourageth many, and makes men worship the rising sun; and many times takes off men's eyes from the king, to his successor; but

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he that serves God, serves "the King everlasting," as the apostle calls him, who will live to dispense rewards to all those who are faithful to him.

3. For the terror of wicked men. The sentence which shall be passed upon men at the day of judgment, is called "eternal judgment," (Heb. vi. 2.) because it decides men's eternal state; the punishment that shall follow this sentence, which shall pass upon the wicked, is called "everlasting punishment," (Matt. xxv. 46.) "Everlasting fire," (Matt. xxv. 41.) "Everlasting destruction," (2 Thess. i. 9.) "The vengeance of eternal fire," (Jude 7.) "The smoke of the bottomless pit," is said "to ascend for ever and ever," (Rev. xiv. 11.) and the wicked "to be tormented day and night, for ever and ever," (Rev. xx. 10.) Now as the punishment of wicked men is founded in the justice of God, and the greatness of it in his power, so the perpetuity and continuance of it in his eternity. The apostle saith, (Heb. x. 31.) "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;" because he that lives for ever, can punish for ever; as the eternal demerit of sin feeds, and animates, and keeps alive, the never-dying worm, so the wrath of the eternal God blows up the eternal flame.

How should this awaken in us a fear of the eternal God! Sinners, what a folly is it, for the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, to incense that justice which will punish and torment you for ever! As good men shall have the everlasting God for their reward, and their happiness, so wicked men shall have him for their judge and avenger!

We fear the wrath of men, whose power is short, and whose breath is in their nostrils, who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Dost thou fear

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" man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as grass?" And is not the wrath of the eternal God much more terrible? (Luke xii. 4, 5.) " And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." The wrath of man is despicable, because it hath bounds and limits; the fury of man can but reach to the body, it can go no farther; it expires with this life, it cannot follow us beyond the grave: but the wrath of the eternal God doth not only reach the body, but the soul; it is not confined to this life, but pursues us to the other world, and extends itself to all eternity.

" Fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell;" that is, to inflict eternal torments; " yea, I say unto you, fear him."

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# SERMON CLVI.

## THE INCOMPREHENSIBLENESS OF GOD.

*Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*—JOB xi. 7.

In treating of the properties and perfections of God, I shall at present consider that which results from the infinite excellency of his nature and perfection, compared with the imperfection of our understandings, which is commonly called the incomprehensibleness of God. This you have expressed here in the words of Zophar, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" &c.

There is no great difficulty in the words; "Canst thou by searching find out God?" *Potesne pervestigare intima Dei*, so Castalio translates it. Dost thou know God intimately and thoroughly, within and without? Canst thou pierce into the centre of his perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? and "Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" Canst thou find out the Almighty, *usque ad ultima*, to the very last and utmost of him? so as thou canst say, after a thorough search and inquiry, "There is no perfection in God beyond this; there is nothing of him now that remains to be known; this he is, and no other; that he is, and no otherwise; this he can do, and no more; hither doth his knowledge, and power, and wisdom reach, and no farther."

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Canst thou do this? These interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had said, No thou canst not; God is unsearchable, he is incomprehensible.

The two questions in the text seem to be only two several expressions of the same thing. The first question is undoubtedly general, concerning the nature and perfections of God in general; "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Canst thou by the most diligent search and inquiry come to a perfect knowledge and understanding of him?

The second question may seem to be a particular instance to the general truth implied in the first question; he seems to instance in his power, as if he had said, God is unsearchable, and then had instanced in a particular perfection, the power of God; "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Thou canst not comprehend the Divine nature and perfections in general; "Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Consider particularly his power, and see if thou canst know the utmost of that. But I rather think that the latter question is altogether the same in sense with the former; and that the attribute of Almighty, which is here given to God, is used by way of description, and not intended by way of instance. "Canst thou find out the Almighty," that is, God, "unto perfection?" Which way soever we take the words, it is not much material, we may ground this observation upon them:

That God is incomprehensible.

This term or attribute is a relative term, and speaks a relation between an object and a faculty, between God and a created understanding; so that the meaning of it is plainly this, that no created un-

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derstanding can comprehend God; that is, have a perfect and exact knowledge of him, such a knowledge as is adequate to the perfection of the object. Or thus, the nature and perfections of God are above the understanding of any of his creatures; it is only his own infinite understanding that can frame a perfect idea of his own perfection. God knows himself, his own understanding comprehends his own perfections. But he is incomprehensible to his creatures.

Indeed, there is nothing more obvious than God; for "he is not far from every one of us; in him we live, and move, and have our being;" there needs no great search to find out that there is a God: "An eternal power and Deity are clearly seen in the things which are made," as the apostle tells us; but the manner of the being, and properties, and perfections of this God, these cannot be comprehended by a finite understanding. I shall prove the doctrine, and then apply it.

First, For the proof of it: I will attempt it these three ways:

I. By way of instance, or induction of particulars.

II. By way of conviction.

III. By giving the clear reason of it.

I. By way of instance. And I shall give you instances both on the part of the object, and of the subject, or the persons who are capable of knowing God in any degree.

1. On the part of the object. The nature of God, the excellency and perfection of God, the works and ways of God, are above our thoughts and apprehensions. The nature of God, it is vast and infinite: (Job xxxvi. 26.) "God is great, and we know him not." (Job xxxvii. 23.) "Touching

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the Almighty we cannot find him out." (Psal. cxlv. 3.) "His greatness is unsearchable."

The excellencies and perfections of God; his immensity, (2 Chron. ii. 6.) "The heaven of heavens cannot contain him:" the eternity of his duration, "from everlasting to everlasting he is God:" we cannot imagine any limits of his presence, nor bounds of his duration. The infiniteness of his knowledge: (Psal. cxlvii. 5.) "His understanding is infinite." When we think of the wisdom and knowledge of God, our best way is to fall into admiration: (Rom. xi. 35.) "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Where the Scripture speaks of those perfections of God, which the creatures do in some measure and degree partake of, as his goodness, and power, and wisdom, and holiness, and immortality, it attributes them in such a peculiar and Divine manner to God, as doth exclude and shut out the creature from any claim, or share, or title to them: (Matt. xix. 16, 17.) "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God." (1 Tim. vi. 15, 16.) "Who is the blessed and only Potentate, who only hath immortality." (1 Tim. i. 17.) "The only wise God." (Rev. xv. 4.) "For thou only art holy." In so inconceivable a manner doth God possess these perfections which he communicates, and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesses them; so that when we consider any of these Divine perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature, nor must we limit them by what they are in the creature, but say, the goodness and the wisdom of God are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not

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able to comprehend; the transcendent degree, and the singularity of these Divine perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The works of God; they are likewise unsearchable; the works of creation and of redemption. (Job v. 9.) "Which doeth great things, and unsearchable; marvellous things, past finding out." And then he instanceth in the works of God, (Job xxvi. 14.) "Lo, these are part of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him! and the thunder of his voice, who can understand?" So that he tells us expressly, we cannot find out the works of God; we do but know part of them. The question which he puts, (Job xxxvii. 16.) "Dost thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?" can only be answered by the words of the Psalmist: (Psal. civ. 24.) "O Lord, how wonderful are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all." The work of redemption: in this there shines forth such wisdom, mercy, and love, as our understandings cannot reach. This work is called "the wisdom of God in a mystery; hidden wisdom," σοφία ἀποκεκρυμμενη, (1 Cor. ii. 7.) The mercy, and grace, and love of it is called, "the riches of God's mercy, the exceeding riches of his grace," (Eph. ii. 4. 7.) Now riches is, when you cannot tell the utmost of them, *pauperes est numerare*. (Eph. iii. 18, 19.) "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." When we have the largest apprehensions of this love, so that we think we comprehend it and know it, it "passeth knowledge;" yea, the effects of God's power and love, which he

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manifests in believers, are unspeakable; for "he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly, above what we can ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us," (Eph. iii. 20.) The peace which guards their souls "passeth all understanding," (Phil. iv. 7.) Those "joys which fill their hearts are not to be expressed." (1 Pet. i. 8.) We read of "joy unspeakable and full of glory." The happiness which they hope for is inconceivable; it is that which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man, which God hath laid up for us."

The ways of God's providence, they are not to be traced: (Psal. lxxvii. 19.) "Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." (Eccles. iii. 11.) "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." We are but of yesterday, and know nothing. When we look upon God's providence, we take a part from the whole, and consider it by itself, without relation to the whole series of his dispensation; we cannot see the whole of God's providence at one view, and never see from the beginning of the works of God to the end; therefore our knowledge of them must needs be very imperfect, and full of mistakes, and false judgments of things; we cannot, by our petty and short-sighted designs, judge of the works of God, and the designs of providence; for "our ways are not as his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts," (Isa. lv. 8, 9.) The ways of God's mercy: (Psal. ciii.) "As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God's mercy." (Psal. cxxxix. 17, 18.) "How



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precious are thy thoughts unto me! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." And the ways of God's judgments, the severity and greatness of his judgment is not known. (Psal. xc.) "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? and who may stand before thee when thou art angry?" And the reasons of his judgments are unsearchable: (Psal. xxxvi. 6.) "Thy judgments are a great deep." (Rom. xi. 33.) "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" These are the instances on the part of the object.

2. On the part of the subject, or the persons capable of knowing God in any measure. The perfect knowledge of God is above a finite creature's understanding. Wicked men are ignorant of God, and full of false apprehensions of him. The Scripture gives this description of them: they are those that "know not God." (2 Thess. i.) Wicked men are so far from knowing God to perfection, that they have hardly any true knowledge of him; for as the man himself is, so will God seem to be to him; the idea and notions which men have of God, is but the picture of their own complexion. To a true knowledge there is required likeness; a man's mind must be like the thing he would understand; therefore the apostle tells us, "the natural or animal man doth not receive the things of God," he is not capable of them, because his mind is unsuitable to them; he is πλήρης τοῦ Σώματος, "full of body," and he cannot relish spiritual things; even those natural notions which wicked men have of God, are strangely tinctured and obscured by the temper of the man; they are *lux sepulta in opaca materia*, "light buried and hid in matter and darkness,"

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in the blackness of a foul and impure heart; so that there is no question of them, whether they comprehend God or not.

But good men cannot find out God, they have some false apprehensions of him; all their apprehensions are dark, have much of obscurity in them; they know God to salvation, but not to perfection. In this life we do but know God in part; that is, in comparison of the knowledge which our natures are capable of.

But I will instance yet higher: the angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, though they have true apprehensions of God, yet they do not arrive to perfect knowledge of him, they cannot *pervestigare ultima*, "know the utmost of God;" the cherubims themselves are continually looking at the mercy-seat. To which the apostle alludes, (1 Pet. i. 12.) when he tells us the mystery of God's mercy in the gospel, is a thing "which the angels desired to pry into." In heaven, "that which is in part shall be done away;" that is, our knowledge shall be as perfect as our natures are capable; but it shall be finite. When we shall "see God face to face;" that is, have an immediate vision of him, "and see him as he is;" that is, not having our understandings tinctured by any lust or passion that may darken our minds, or misrepresent the object; for the apostle tells us, "we shall see him, because we shall be like him;" yet then we shall have short and inadequate apprehensions of him, we shall still retain our limited natures and finite understandings.

II. By way of conviction. Dost thou know perfectly the nature of a finite spirit, the perfection and the power of an angel, how, being immaterial,



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they can act upon the matter, and move that which can make no resistance to a spirit? Dost thou know how they can move themselves to a great distance in a moment, and dart themselves from one part of the world to another? Dost thou know how man is "formed in the lowest parts of the earth," as the Psalmist expresseth it, and the curious frame of our bodies is wrought from such rude principles in so dark a shop? Canst thou give an account how the soul is united to the body, by what bands or holds a spirit is so closely and intimately conjoined to matter? Dost thou know how thyself understandest any thing, and canst retain the distinct ideas and notions of so many objects without confusion? Dost thou know the least parts of matter how they are knit together; and by what cement they cleave so fast to one another, that they can hardly be separated?

Now if the creatures be so unsearchable, and the knowledge of these be too hard for thee, is not the Creator of them much more incomprehensible, who possesseth all these perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a creature? If in natural and sensible things, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus;* how much more is it true of God, that "our ignorance is more than our knowledge," when the whole earth and all the creatures bear no proportion to him? (Isa. xl. 15. 17.) "Behold, all the nations of the earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as the small dust of the balance; all nations before him are nothing, and are accounted to him less than nothing."

III. By shewing you the clear reason of it, which is this—the disproportion between the faculty and

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the object, the finiteness of our understandings, and the infiniteness of the Divine nature and perfections. "God is greater than our hearts;" and therefore as he knows more than we do, as the apostle reasons, (1 John iii. 20.) so he is more than can be known by us; he is too vast an object for our understanding to entertain, for our minds to receive. Thou mayest as well mete out the heaven with a span, and measure the waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the dust of the earth in a little urn, and weigh the mountains in scales, and the hills in a little balance, as think to circumscribe God in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compass of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vastness and greatness of the object, but the glory and resplendency of it does so dazzle our sight, that we cannot perfectly see it: (1 Tim. vi. 16.) "He dwelleth in light, which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." As God is too big, so he is too bright an object for our understandings; the presence of his glory overpowers our minds, and bears down our faculties, and conquers our understandings.

I come now to apply this doctrine of the incomprehensibleness of the Divine nature. If the nature, and perfections, and ways, and works of God be incomprehensible, and past finding out;

I. It calls for our admiration, and veneration, and reverence. These are the best apprehensions of him that is incomprehensible; a silent veneration of his excellencies, is the best acknowledgment of them. We must admire what we cannot apprehend or express, (Zech. ix. 17.) "How great is his

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goodness, and how great is his beauty!" The best way to celebrate the praises of God, is that which Nehemiah useth, (Nehem. ix. 5.) "And blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." Whenever we speak or think of God, we necessarily detract from his perfections; but even this necessity is glorious to him, and this speaks his perfection, that the highest finite understanding must have imperfect thoughts of him.

We should make up in reverence and veneration what we fall short of in knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of distance; by our reverence of the Divine Majesty, we should best awe our hearts, in a sense of the distance which is between his infinite nature and perfection, and our finite apprehensions. Worldly greatness will cause wonder, the thoughts of earthly majesty will compose us to reverence; how much more should those excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine? (Isa. vi.) You have there God represented sitting upon his throne, and the seraphims about him, which are described to us as having "each six wings, and with twain they cover their faces." Creatures of the brightest understanding, and the most exalted purity and holiness, cover their faces in the presence of God's glory; they choose rather to venerate God, than look upon him.

II. This calls for humility and modesty. The consideration of God's unsearchable perfections should make "the haughtiness of man to stoop, and bring down his proud looks, and God alone should be exalted." The thought of God's excellency should abase us, and make us "vile in our own eyes;" it should make all those petty excellencies that we pride ourselves in, to vanish and disappear.

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"Those treasures of wisdom and knowledge" which are in God, should "hide pride from man:" it should hide those little parts and gifts which we are so apt to glory in, as the sun hides the stars. When we consider God, we should be so far from admiring ourselves, that we should, with a humble thankfulness, wonder that God should regard such inconsiderable nothings as we are. (Psal. viii. 1. 3, 4.) "O Lord our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens! When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" He that considers the glory of God, and the greatness of his works, will think so meanly of himself, that he will be astonished that God should mind him or visit him. This is a noble strain of humility in David, by which he acknowledgeth that the greatest king of the earth, how considerable soever he may be in respect of men, is yet but a pitiful thing to God.

When we speak to God, we should do it with great humility. (Eccles. v. 2, 3.) "Let thy words be few, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth." We should say to God, (Job xxxvii. 19.) "Teach us what we shall say unto thee, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness." And when we think or speak of him, we should do it with great modesty; we should not rashly pronounce or determine any thing concerning God. Simonides being asked what God was, desired one day's time to consider; then he desired two, and then four. The more we think of God, the less peremptory shall we be in defining him. He that considers that God

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is incomprehensible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmost of infinite power, and all the reasons of God's ways and providences. He that rightly values his own short understanding, and the unlimited perfections of God, will not be apt to say, this God cannot do, this he cannot know, such ways are not agreeable to his wisdom. He that knows God and himself, will be modest in these cases; he will ἐπέχειν, abstain from all peremptory pronouncing in these matters; he considers that one man many times differs so much from another in knowledge, and skill of working, that he can do those things which another believes impossible: but we have pitiful thoughts of God, if we think the difference between one man and another, is any thing to the vast distance that is between the Divine understanding and our ignorance, the Divine power and our weakness, the wisdom of God and the folly of men.

III. The incomprehensibleness of God's perfections calls for the highest degree of our affection. How should we fear this great and glorious God! (Psal. xc. 11.) "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Fear is the most infinite of all our passions, and fills us with the most endless jealousy and suspicions: God's wrath is greater than our fear; "according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

How should we love him, when we are astonished with admiration of God's goodness, and say, "How great is thy goodness, and how great is thy beauty! Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" How great should our love be to him! what manner of love should we return to him!

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This calls for the highest degree of our faith. With what confidence should we rely upon him, "who is able to do for us exceeding above what we can ask or think!"

To conclude. This requires the highest degree of our service: how should our hearts be "enlarged to run the way of his commandments," who hath laid up for us such things, "that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man!"

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# SERMON CLVII.

## GOD THE FIRST CAUSE, AND LAST END.

*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*— ROM. xi. 36.

HAVING considered the more eminent and absolute perfections of the Divine nature, as also that which results from the infinite excellency and perfection of God, compared with the imperfection of our understandings, I come, in the last place, to treat of such as are merely and purely relative: as, that he is the first cause, and the last end, of all things; to which purpose I have chosen these words of the apostle for the subject of my present discourse, "For of him, and through him," &c.

The dependance of these words upon the former, is briefly this. The apostle had been speaking before in this chapter, several things that might tend to raise us to an admiration of the wisdom, and goodness, and mercy of God, in the dispensation of his grace for the salvation of men, both Jews and gentiles, and therefore would have us ascribe this work wholly to God; the contrivance of it to his wisdom, and not to our own counsels, (ver. 34.) "For who hath known the mind of the Lord; and who hath been his counsellor?" And the bestowing this grace to his free goodness and mercy, and not to any desert of ours, (ver. 35.) "Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?" Yea, and not only in the dispensation

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of grace, but of all good things; not only in this work of redemption, but also of creation; God is the fountain and original, and first cause, from whence every thing proceeds; and the last end, to which every thing is to be referred; "For of him," &c. ἐξ αὐτοῦ, "from him," the efficient cause producing all things; δι' αὐτοῦ, "by or through him," as the efficient conserving cause of all things; καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν, "and to him," as the final cause of all things, and the end for which they were made.

The proposition I shall speak to, is, that God is the first cause, and last end.

First, I shall a little explain the terms.

Secondly, Confirm the proposition.

Thirdly, Apply it.

First, For the explication of the terms.

I. That God is the first cause, signifies,

1. Negatively, That he had no cause, did not derive his being from any other, or does depend upon any other being; but that he was always, and eternally of himself.

2. Positively, That he is the cause of all things besides himself, the fountain and original of all created beings, from whom all things proceed, and upon whom all things depend; or, that I may use the expression of St. John, (John i. 3.) which I know is appropriated to the second person in the Trinity, "By him all things were made, and without him was nothing made, that was made." So that when we attribute to God, that he is the first, we mean, that there was nothing before him, and that he was before all things, and that all things are by him.

II. The last end; that is, that all things refer to him; that is, the design and aim of all things that are made, is the illustration of God's glory some

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way or other, and the manifestation of his perfections.

Secondly, For the confirmation, I shall briefly, according to my usual method, attempt it these two ways:

I. By natural light. The notion of a God contains in it all possible perfection. Now the utmost perfection we can imagine, is, for a being to be always of itself, before all other beings; and not only so, but to be the cause of all other things; that is, that there should be nothing but what derives its being from him, and continually depends upon him; from whence follows, that all things must refer to him as their last end. For every wise agent acts with design, and in order to an end. Now the end is that which is best, which is most worthy the attaining, and that is God himself. Now his being and perfections are already; and the best, next to the existence of his being and perfections, is the manifestation of them, which is called God's glory; and this is the highest end that we can imagine, to which all the effects of the Divine power, and goodness, and wisdom, do refer.

And that these titles are to be attributed to God, is not only reasonable, when it is revealed and discovered, but was discovered by the natural light of the heathens. Hence it was that Aristotle gave God those titles of the first being, the first cause, and the first mover; and his master Plato calls God the author and parent of all things, the maker and architect of the world, and of all creatures, the fountain and original of all things. Porphyry calls him τὸ πρῶτον, "the first;" from whence he reasons to this sense, that he is the ultimate end, and that all things move towards God; that all motions centre

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in him; because (saith he) it is most proper and natural for things to refer to their original, and to refer all to him from whom they receive all. Antoninus, the emperor and philosopher, speaking of nature (which with the Stoics signifies God) had these words, which are so very like these of the apostle, that they may seem to be taken from him; ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα; "Of thee are all things; in thee are all things; to thee are all things."

II. From Scripture. Hither belong all those places where he declares himself to be "the first and the last." (Isa. xli. 4.) "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he." (Isa. xliii. 10.) "Before me there was no God formed, (or, as it is in the margin, 'there was nothing formed of God,') neither shall there be after me." (Isa. xliv. 6.) "I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God." (Isa. xlviii. 12, 13.) "I am the first; I am also the last: my hand hath laid the foundation of the earth; my right hand hath spread the heavens:" which is as much as to say, he hath made the world, and was the first cause of all things. (Rev. i. 8.) "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord; which is, and which was, and which is to come."

But more expressly, (1 Cor. viii. 6.) "But to us there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we by him," καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτὸν, "and we to him, and for him." (Acts xvii. 24.) "God, that made the world, and all things therein." (Ver. 25.) "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." (Ver. 28.) "In him we live, and move, and have our being." (Ver. 29.) "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God."

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Hither we may refer those texts which attribute the same to the second Person in the Trinity, as the eternal wisdom and word of God, whereby all things were made, (John i. 3.) "All things were made by him, and without him was nothing made that was made." (Ver. 10.) "And the world was made by him." (1 Cor. viii. 6.) "And one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (Eph. iii. 9.) "God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." (Col. i. 16, 17.) "By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Heb. i. 2.) "By whom also he made the worlds." And, (ver. 3.) "Upholding all things by the word of his power.

Thirdly, and lastly, To apply this doctrine.

Use. First, If God be the first cause of all things, who did at first produce all creatures, and does since preserve them, and govern them, and disposeth of all their concernments, and orders all things that befal them: from hence let us learn,

1. With humility and thankfulness to own, and acknowledge, and admire, and bless God, as the author and original of our being, as the spring and fountain of all the blessings and good things that we enjoy. If we do but consider what these words signify, that God is the first cause of all things, we shall see great reason to own and acknowledge, to adore and praise him, and that with the greatest humility, because we have not given him any thing, but have received all from him; he is the cause of all things, who did freely, and of his own good will and pleasure, communicate being to us without any

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constraint or necessity, but what his own goodness laid upon him. (Rev. iv. 11.) "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." We could not before we were deserve any thing from him, or move him by any argument, or importune him by entreaties to make us; but he freely gave us being, and ever since we depend upon him, and have been preserved by him, and cannot subsist one moment without the continued influence of the power and goodness which first called us out of nothing. He is the author of all the good, and the fountain of all those blessings, which for the present we enjoy, and for the future hope for.

When he made us at first, he designed us for happiness; and when we, by our sin and wilful miscarriage, fell short of the happiness which he designed us for, he sent his Son into the world for our recovery, and gave his life for the ransom of our souls. He hath not only admitted us into a new covenant, wherein he hath promised pardon and eternal life to us; but he hath also purchased these blessings for us by the most endearing price, the blood of his own Son, and hath saved us in such a manner as may justly astonish us. Upon these considerations we should awaken ourselves to the praise of God, and, with the holy Psalmist, call up our spirits, and summon all the powers and faculties of our souls, to assist us in this work. (Psal. ciii. 1—4, &c.) "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;" it is he

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that "satisfies our soul with good things," that hath promised eternal life and happiness to us, and must confer and bestow this upon us; "therefore our souls, and all that is within us, should bless his holy name."

2. If God be the first cause, that is, orders all things that befal us, and by his providence disposeth of all our concernments, this should teach us with patience and quietness to submit to all events, to all evils and afflictions that come upon us, as being disposed by his wise providence, and coming from him: we are apt to attribute all things to the next and immediate agent, and to look no higher than second causes, not considering that all the motions of natural causes are directly subordinate to the first cause; and all the actions of free creatures are under the government of God's wise providence, so that nothing happens to us besides the designs and intention of God.

And methinks this is one particular excellency of the style of the Scripture above all other books, that the constant phrase of the sacred dialect is to attribute all events (excepting sins only) to God; so that every one that reads it, cannot but take notice that it is wrote with a more attentive consideration of God than any other book, as appears by those frequent and express acknowledgments of God as the cause of all events; so that what in other writers would be said to be done by this or that person, is ascribed to God. Therefore it is so often said, that the Lord did this and that, stirred up such an enemy, brought such a judgment. And we shall find that holy men, in Scripture, make excellent use of this consideration, to argue themselves into patience and contentedness in every condition. So Eli: (1 Sam. iii. 18.) "It is the Lord, let him do

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what seemeth him good." So Job, he did not so consider the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who had carried away his oxen and his camels, and slain his servants; nor the wind which had thrown down his house, and killed his sons and his daughters; but he looks up to God, the great governor and disposer of all these events; "The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." So David, (Psal. xxxix. 9.) "I was dumb, and spake not a word; because thou, Lord, didst it." So our blessed Saviour, when he was ready to suffer, he did not consider the malice of the Jews, which was the cause of his death, but looks to a higher hand; "The cup which my Father gives me to drink, shall not I drink it?"

He that looks upon all things as coming from second causes, and does not eye the first cause, the good and wise Governor, will be apt to take offence at every cross and unwelcome accident. Men are apt to be angry, when one flings water upon them as they pass in the streets; but no man is offended if he is wet by rain from heaven. When we look upon evils as coming only from men, we are apt to be impatient, and know not how to bear them; but we should look upon all things as under the government and disposal of the first cause, and the circumstances of every condition as allotted to us by the wise providence of God; this consideration, that it is the hand of God, and that he hath done it, would still all the murmurings of our spirits. As when a seditious multitude is in an uproar, the presence of a grave and venerable person will hush the noise, and quell the tumult; so, if we would but represent God as present to all actions, and governing and disposing all events, this would still and



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appease our spirits, when they are ready to riot and mutiny against any of his dispensations.

Use the second. If God be the last end of all, let us make him our last end, and refer all our actions to his glory. This is that which is due to him, as he is the first cause, and therefore he does most reasonably require it of us.

And herein, likewise, the Scripture doth excel all other books; that is, doth more frequently and expressly mind us of this end, and calls upon us to propose it to ourselves as our ultimate aim and design. We should love him as our chief end; (Matt. xxii. 37.) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Thus to love God, is that which in the language of the schools is loving God as our chief end. So, likewise, the apostle requires that we should refer all the actions of our lives to this end: (1 Cor. x. 31.) "Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God;" that we should "glorify him in our souls, and in our bodies, which are his." He is the author of all the powers that we have, and therefore we should use them for him; we do all by him, and therefore we should do all to him.

And that we may the better understand ourselves as to this duty, I shall endeavour to give satisfaction to a question or two, which may arise about it.

First, Whether an actual intention of God's glory be necessary to make every action that we do good and acceptable to God?

Answer.—1. It is necessary that the glory of God, either formally or virtually, should be the ultimate end and scope of our lives, and all our actions; otherwise, they will be defective in that which in moral actions is most considerable, and that is, the

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end. If a man should keep all the commandments of the gospel, this excepted, of making God's glory his supreme end, only with a design to gain reputation, or some other advantage in the world, this very thing would vitiate all, and render him unacceptable to God.

2. It is very requisite and convenient, as a good sign, that we should very frequently actually think upon, and intend, this end; for if it be very much out of our thoughts, we have some reason to be jealous of ourselves, that we do not intend it at all.

3. It is so far from being necessary, that we should in every action have this intention of God's glory, that it is not morally possible that we should, no more than it is possible, that a man that goes a journey of a thousand miles, should every step he takes have actual thoughts of his journey's end; nor is it more necessary; for consideration of the end, is only so far necessary, as it is necessary to guide and quicken us in the use of means; as it is not necessary for a man to think of his journey's end, farther than to direct and excite him to go thither. And this appears farther by the contrary; it is not necessary to make a sinful action, that a man should formally, much less actually, intend God's dishonour; it is enough to constitute a man a wicked man, if he willingly transgress God's law, the doing whereof does, by consequence, reflect a dishonour upon him; so, on the other hand, it is sufficient to make an action good and acceptable, if it be conformable to God's law, and such as by consequence redounds to God's glory.

Second question. Whether the glory of God may or ought to be considered as an end separate and distinct from our own happiness?



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Answer.—I shall speak but briefly to this, because I have elsewhere spoken to it; but in that little which I have to say for satisfaction to this question, I will proceed by these steps:

I. By the glory of God, we mean the demonstration, or illustration, or manifestation, of some or all of his perfections, more especially his goodness, and mercy, and justice, and wisdom, and power, and holiness.

II. It is plain, that the manifestation of some of these perfections is a thing that may be separated from the happiness of a creature; for his holiness, and justice, and power, may and shall be manifested in the final and eternal ruin of impenitent sinners.

III. The manifestation of any of God's perfections, ought many times to be propounded by us as an end distinct and separate from our respective happiness; such a happiness as respects only some particulars, and some particular duration, in opposition to absolute and eternal happiness. In this sense our Saviour says, that he "sought not his own glory, but the glory of him that sent Him:" by which he does not mean, that he quitted everlasting glory and happiness; but that, in order to the glory of God, he did for a time lay aside his own glory, and divest himself of it while he was in this world; for the apostle tells us, that he was encouraged to do this out of a respect to a greater glory. (Heb. xii. 2.) "Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." And in this sense we are to understand the command of self-denial in the gospel, with reference to our particular or temporal, not our eternal interest; and

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that it is no more, is plain from the argument our Saviour uses to encourage this self-denial, the promise of a far greater happiness than that we deny; no man that "forsakes father or mother for my sake, but shall have eternal life:" and proportionably we are to understand those commands of loving Christ more than ourselves; that is, more than any temporal interest.

IV. The manifestation of any of God's perfections, neither ought nor can reasonably be propounded by us as an end separated from, or opposite to our eternal blessedness; that is, we cannot naturally or reasonably desire the glory of God should be advanced, though it were to our final ruin, either by annihilation or eternal misery.

1. We cannot, either naturally or reasonably, desire God should be glorified by our annihilation.

(1.) Not naturally. Because such a desire would be directly contrary to the natural desire of self-preservation, which God himself hath planted in us, and is most intimate and essential to our nature.

(2.) Not reasonably. Because it is utterly unimaginable how God can be glorified by the annihilation of a creature. All the attributes that we can imagine can be manifested herein, are power and sovereignty; his power hath already been as much manifested in creating and making the creature out of nothing, as it can be by reducing it into nothing; for to create, is the very same demonstration of power as to annihilate. And as for his sovereignty, God will never manifest that in contradiction to his goodness, or wisdom, or any other perfection of the Divine nature. To unmake a creature, and take away the being which he had given, would argue either a failure of his goodness toward the creature,

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or that he did repent that he had made it, which would reflect upon his wisdom and constancy. I do not say, that in justice God cannot annihilate a creature; far be it from me: for what he gave was his own, and he might without any wrong to the creature take it again.

2. Much less can we naturally desire that God should be glorified in our eternal misery. The reasons which I give about annihilation are stronger here; therefore we cannot naturally desire it, nor reasonably, for the demonstration of his power, or sovereignty, or justice, or holiness, which, I think, are all the attributes which we can imagine to be glorified hereby: not as the manifestation of his power; for that would be as much manifested in the happiness, as misery of the creature: not of his sovereignty; for God will not manifest that in contradiction to his goodness, upon which nothing can reflect more, than merely, *pro arbitrio*, for his pleasure, to make an innocent creature for ever miserable: not his justice and holiness; for these presuppose sin and demerit in the creature, out of hatred to which he makes it miserable; but God hath declared that he esteems himself more glorified by the obedience and happiness of his creatures, than by their sin and destruction; and if it were reasonable to desire the justice and holiness of God might be glorified in my eternal ruin, which I have deserved by sin; this would plainly follow from it, that it were reasonable to sin, that justice might abound: which of the two is a greater absurdity than that which the apostle condemns of "sinning that grace may abound."

V. There is a strict and inviolable connexion between the greatest glory of God and our obedience

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and happiness; I say, between his greatest glory, because he esteems himself more glorified by the obedience and happiness of his creatures, than by their ruin and misery: and that we may believe it, we have his oath for it; "As I live, saith the Lord, I delight not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live." And it is observable, that the apostle, in 1 Cor. x. 31—33, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God: giving none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved;" explains the glorifying of God, by edifying and promoting the salvation of others.

VI. We may consider the glory of God, as some ways distinct from our happiness; that is, we may consider the manifestation of his goodness, and mercy, and wisdom, in our happiness, as that which results from it; but this is not enough to make it a distinct end, but the same diversely considered; as the public good is that which results from the general good of particular persons, but cannot reasonably be propounded by any man, as an end distinct from the general happiness of particular persons, without ruining and destroying the notion of public good.

VII. Though considered as we are particular beings, we can have no greater end than our own happiness, in which God is eminently glorified; yet, as we are part of the whole creation and workmanship of God, which is the noblest consideration of ourselves, the glory of God, which results from the manifestation of all his perfections in and about his creatures, is precisely our ultimate end, and yet not

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an end really distinct from our own happiness; and therefore, it is most proper, and becoming, and agreeable to the wise style of Scripture, to give our end its denomination, not from the more particular and narrow, but the more noble consideration of ourselves, as we are parts of the whole creation and workmanship of God; as it is more generous and becoming for the members of a civil society to mention the public good as their end, than their private happiness and advantage, though that be so really and effectually promoted by the public good.

Thus I have finished what I proposed on this argument, and concerning the attributes of God in general; "Of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen."

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# SERMON CLVIII.

## THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE AND FAITH.

*Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*—ACTS xx. 21.

To have seen St. Paul in the pulpit, was one of those three things which St. Augustine thought worth the wishing for. And sure it were very desirable to have seen this glorious instrument of God, who did such wonders in the world, to have heard that plain and powerful eloquence of his, which was so "mighty through God, for the casting down of strong holds, and the subduing of men to the obedience of the gospel;" to have beheld the zeal of this holy man, who was all on fire for God, with what ardency of affection, and earnestness of expression, he persuaded men to come in to Christ, and entertain the gospel. This were very desirable; but seeing it is a thing we cannot hope for, it should be some satisfaction to our curiosity, to know what St. Paul preached, what was the main subject of his sermons, whither he referred all his discourses, and what they tended to. This he tells us in the words that I have read to you, that the main substance of all his sermons was "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

The occasion of the words was briefly this; St. Paul being in his journey to Jerusalem, and in-

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tending to be there by the day of Pentecost, that he might not be hindered in his journey, he resolves to pass by Ephesus, and only to call to him the elders of the church, to charge them with their duty, and the care of the church; and to engage them hereto, he tells them how he had carried and demeaned himself among them, (ver. 18.) with what diligence and vigilance he had watched over them, with what affection and earnestness he had preached to them, (ver. 19, 20.) And here in the text he tells them what had been the sum of his doctrine, and the substance of those many sermons he had preached among them, and what was the end and design of all his discourses; viz. To persuade men to "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; testifying both to the Jews and Greeks," &c.

I shall explain the words a little, and then fix upon the observations which I intend to speak to, because I design this only as a preface to some larger discourses of faith and repentance.

For explication. "Testifying," the word is διαμαρτυρόμενος, which signifies to testify, to prove a thing by testimony; so it is used, (Heb. ii. 6.) "But one in a certain place testifieth, saying." In heathen writers the word is often used in a law sense, for contesting by law, and pleading in a cause; and from hence it signifies earnestly to contend or persuade by arguments and threatenings. In the use of the LXX. it signifies to protest, to convince, to press earnestly, to persuade. It is used most frequently by St. Luke in a very intense signification; and is sometimes joined with exhorting, which is an earnest persuading to a thing, (Acts ii. 40.) "And with many other words did he testify and exhort,

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saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation;" and with preaching, (Acts viii. 25.) "And when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord;" and so (Acts xviii. 5.) "Being pressed in spirit, he testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." "Being pressed in spirit" signifies intention and vehemency in testifying to them, that he did vehemently endeavour to convince them; it seems to be equivalent to the expression, (ver. 28.) where it is said, "Apollos did mightily convince the Jews that Jesus was the Christ;" that is, did use such persuasions and arguments as were sufficient to convince; and to mention no more, (Acts xxviii. 23.) "He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus."

St. Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, useth this word in a most vehement sense, for giving a solemn charge, (1 Tim. v. 21.) "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ;" the word is διαμαρτύρομαι; and so (2 Tim. ii. 14.) "Charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words;" and so (2 Tim. iv. 1.) "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ;" and here in the text the word seems to be of a very high and intense signification, because of the circumstances mentioned before and after; he tells us before, that he taught them "at all seasons," (ver. 18.) "publicly, and from house to house," (ver. 20.) And afterwards, at the 31st verse, that "he warned them day and night with tears." So that "testifying to the Jews repentance and faith," must signify his pressing and persuading of them with the greatest vehemency to turn from their sins, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; his charging on them these things as their duty, his pleading with them the necessity of faith and re-

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pentance, and earnestly endeavouring to convince them thereof.

"Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ:" what is the reason of this appropriation of repentance and faith, the one as properly respecting God, and the other our Lord Jesus Christ? I answer: Repentance doth properly respect God, because he is the party offended, and to whom we are to be reconciled; the faith of the gospel doth properly refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the chief and principal object of it; so that by "testifying to them repentance toward God," &c. we are to understand that the apostle did earnestly press and persuade them to repent of their sins, whereby they had offended God, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messias, the person that was ordained of God, and sent to be the Saviour of the world.

From the words thus explained, this is the observation that doth naturally arise,

That repentance and faith are the sum and substance of the gospel; and that ministers ought with all earnestness and vehemency to press people to repent and believe, to charge them with these as their duty, and by all means to endeavour to convince them of the necessity of them.

In the handling of this I shall do these two things:

First, Shew you what is included in repentance and faith, that you may see that they are the sum of the gospel. And,

Secondly, Shew you the necessity of them.

First, What is included in these.

I. Repentance: this properly signifies a change of mind, a conviction that we have done amiss, so as to be truly sorry for what we have done, and

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heartily to wish that we had not done it. To repent, is to alter our mind, to have other apprehensions of things than we had, to look upon that now as evil which we did not before; from whence follows sorrow for what we have done, and a resolution of mind for the future not to do again that which appears now to us to be so evil, that we are ashamed of it, and troubled for it, and wish we had never done it. So that repentance implies a conviction that we have done something that is evil and sinful, contrary to the law we are under, and those obligations of duty and gratitude that lie upon us, whereby God is highly provoked and incensed against us, and we in danger of his wrath, and the sad effects of his displeasure; upon which we are troubled, and grieved, and ashamed for what we have done, and wish we had been wiser, and had done otherwise: hereupon we resolve never to do any thing that is sinful, that is contrary to our duty and obligations to God, and by which we may provoke him against us. These two things are contained in a true repentance, a deep sense of, and sorrow for, the evils that are past, and the sins we have committed; and a firm purpose and resolution of obedience for the future, of abstaining from all sin, and doing whatever is our duty: the true effect of which resolution, is the breaking off the practice of sin, and the course of a wicked life, and a constant course of obedience.

II. Faith in Christ is an effectual believing the revelation of the gospel, the history and the doctrine of it: the history of it—that there was such a person as Jesus Christ; that he was the true Messias, prophesied of and promised in the Old Testament; that he was born, and lived, and preached, and wrought

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the miracles that are recorded; that he was crucified and rose again, and ascended into heaven; that he was the Son of God, and sent by him into the world, by his doctrine to instruct, and by the example of his life to go before us in the way to happiness, and by the merit and satisfaction of his death and sufferings, to appease and reconcile God to us, and to purchase for us the pardon of our sins and eternal life, upon the conditions of faith, and repentance, and sincere obedience; and that to enable us to the performance of these conditions, he promised and afterward sent his Holy Spirit to accompany the preaching of his gospel, and to assist all Christians to the doing of that which God requires of them: this is the history of the gospel.

Now the doctrine of it contains the precepts, and promises, and threatenings of it, and faith in Christ includes a firm belief of all these; of the precepts of the gospel as the matter of our duty, and the rule of our life: and of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, as arguments to our duty, to encourage our obedience, and deter us from sin. So that he that believes the Lord Jesus, believes him to be the great guide and teacher sent from God, to bring and conduct men to eternal happiness, and that therefore we ought to hearken to him and follow him; this is to believe his prophetical office. He believes that he is the author of salvation, and hath purchased for us forgiveness of sins, ransom from hell, and eternal life and blessedness upon the conditions beforementioned, and therefore that we ought to rely upon him only for salvation, to own him for our Saviour, and to beg of him his Holy Spirit, which he hath promised to us, to enable us to perform the conditions required on our part: this is to believe

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his priestly office. And, lastly, he believes that the precepts of the gospel, being delivered to us by the Son of God, ought to have the authority of laws upon us, and that we are bound to be obedient to them; and for our encouragement, if we be so, that there is a glorious and eternal reward promised to us; and for our terror, if we be not, there are terrible and eternal punishments threatened to us; to which rewards, the Lord Jesus Christ, at the day of judgment, will sentence men, as the great Judge of the world: and this is to believe the kingly office of Christ. And this is the sum of that which is meant by "faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ," which the apostle saith was one subject of his preaching.

And the proper and genuine effect of this faith, is to live as we believe, to conform our lives to the doctrine, to the truth whereof we assent. Hence it is that true Christians, that is, those who fashioned their lives according to the gospel, are called believers; and the whole of Christianity is many times contained in this word *believing*, which is the great principle of a Christian life. As in the Old Testament all religion is expressed by "the fear of God;" so in the New, by "faith in Christ."

And now you see what is included in repentance and faith, you may easily judge, whether these be not the sum of the gospel, that men should forsake their sins and turn to God, and believe in the revelation of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ; that is, heartily entertain and submit to it. What did Christ preach to the Jews, but that they should repent of their sins, and believe on him as the Messias? And what did the apostles preach, but to the same purpose? When St. Peter preached to the Jews, (Acts ii.) the effect of the sermon and the scope of it was

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to persuade them "to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus," that is, to profess their belief in him, (ver. 38.) And so (Acts iii. 19.) this is the conclusion of his discourse, "Repent therefore and be converted;" and then he propounded Christ to them as the object of their faith, being the great prophet that was prophesied of by Moses, who should "be raised up among them," (ver. 22.) So, likewise, St. Paul, when he preached to the Jews and gentiles, these were his great subjects, (Acts xvii. 30.) This is the conclusion of his sermon to the Athenians, to persuade them to repent by the consideration of a future judgment, and to persuade them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to be the judge of the world, from the miracle of his resurrection: "But now he commands all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day, &c. whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." So that you see that these are the great doctrines of the gospel, and were the sum of the apostles' preaching; all their sermons were persuasives to these two duties of repentance and faith.

Secondly, For the necessity of these doctrines. They are necessary for the escaping of eternal misery, and attaining of everlasting happiness. And this will appear, by considering the nature of them, and the relation they have to both these.

For the avoiding of eternal punishment, it is necessary that guilt should be removed, which is an obligation to punishment, and that cannot be but by pardon: and sure we cannot imagine that God will ever pardon us without repentance: he will never remit to us the punishment of sin, so long as we tell him we are not at all troubled for what we have

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done, and we are of the same mind still, and will do the same again; and till we repent, we tell God this, and we may be sure God will not cast away his pardons upon those that despise them; so that repentance is necessary to the escaping of hell.

And faith in Christ is necessary to it; for if this be the method of God's grace, not to pardon sin without satisfaction, and Jesus Christ hath made satisfaction for sin by the merit of his sufferings; and if it be necessary that we should believe this, that the benefit hereof may redound to us; then faith in Christ is necessary to the obtaining of the pardon of sin, by which the guilt of sin is removed; that is, our obligation to eternal punishment.

And then for attaining salvation. Christ having in the gospel revealed to us the way and means to eternal happiness, it is necessary that we should believe this revelation of the gospel by Jesus Christ, in order to this end. So that you see the necessity of faith and repentance: because without these we can neither escape misery, nor attain to happiness.

I should now come to draw some inferences from this discourse, but I will first give satisfaction to a query or two, to which this discourse seems to have given occasion.

1st Query.—You will say, why do I call repentance a doctrine of the gospel? It is a doctrine of nature. Natural religion tells us, that when we have offended God we ought to be sorry for it, and resolve to amend and reform.

Answer.—I do not make the doctrine of repentance proper to the gospel, as if it had not been revealed to the world before; but because it is a doctrine which the gospel very much presseth and persuadeth men to, and because the great motives and enforce-



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ments of it are peculiar to the gospel. So that the doctrine of repentance, considered with those powerful reasons and arguments to it which the gospel furnisheth us withal, is in this sense proper to the gospel, and not known to the world before.

There are two motives and enforcements to repentance which the gospel furnisheth us with.

1. Assurance of pardon and remission of sins in case of repentance, which is a great encouragement to repentance, and which, before the gospel, the world had never any firm and clear assurance of.

2. Assurance of eternal rewards and punishments after this life, which is a strong argument to persuade men to change their lives, that they may avoid the misery that is threatened to impenitent sinners, and be qualified for the happiness which it promiseth to repentance and obedience. And this, the apostle tells us in the forementioned place (Acts xvii. 30, 31.) is that which doth, as it were, make repentance to be a new doctrine that did come with the gospel into the world, because it was never before enforced with this powerful argument; "The times of that ignorance God winked at; but now he calls upon all men every where to repent; because," &c. When the world was in ignorance, and had not such assurance of a future state, of eternal rewards and punishments after this life, the arguments to repentance were weak and feeble in comparison to what they now are; the necessity of this duty was not so evident. But now God hath assured us of a future judgment, now exhortations to repentance have a commanding power and influence upon men: so that repentance, both as it is that which is very much pressed and inculcated in the gospel, and as it hath its chief motives and enforcements from the

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gospel, may be said to be one of the great doctrines of the gospel.

Query 2.—Whether the preaching of faith in Christ, among those who are already Christians, be at all necessary? Because it seems very improper to press those to believe in Christ, who are already persuaded that he is the Messias, and do entertain the history and doctrine of the gospel.

Answer.—The faith which the apostle here means, and which he would persuade men to, is an effectual belief of the gospel; such a faith as hath real effects upon men, and makes them to live as they believe; such a faith as persuades them of the need of these blessings that the gospel offers, and makes them to desire to be partakers of them, and in order thereto to be willing to submit to those terms and conditions of holiness and obedience which the gospel requires. This is the faith we would persuade men to, and there is nothing more necessary to be pressed upon the greatest part of Christians than this; for how few are there among those who profess to believe the gospel, who believe it in this effectual manner, so as to conform themselves to it? The faith which most Christians pretend to, is merely negative; they do not disbelieve the gospel, they do not consider it, nor trouble themselves about it; they do not care, nor are concerned whether it be true or not; but they have not a positive belief of it, they are not possessed with a firm persuasion of the truth of those matters which are contained in it; if they were, such a persuasion would produce real and positive effects. Every man naturally desires happiness, and it is impossible that any man that is possessed with this belief, that, in order to happiness, it is necessary for him to do such and such things;



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and that if he omit or neglect them, he is unavoidably miserable, that he should not do them. Men say they believe this or that, but you may see in their lives what it is they believe. So that the preaching of this faith in Christ, which is the only true faith, is still necessary.

I. Inference.—If repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, be the sum and substance of the gospel, then from hence we may infer the excellency of the Christian religion, which insists only upon those things which do tend to our perfection and our happiness. Repentance tends to our recovery, and the bringing of us back as near as may be to innocence. *Primus innocentiæ gradus est non peccasse: secundus, pœnitentia:* and then faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, though it be very comprehensive, and contains many things in it, yet nothing but what is eminently for our advantage, and doth very much conduce to our happiness. The historical part of the gospel acquaints us with the person and actions of our Saviour, which conduceth very much to our understanding of the author and means of our salvation. The doctrinal part of the gospel contains what God requires on our part, and the encouragements and arguments to our duty, from the consideration of the recompence and rewards of the next life. The precepts of Christ's doctrine are such as tend exceedingly to the perfection of our nature, being all founded in reason, in the nature of God, and of a reasonable creature; I except only those positive institutions of the Christian religion, the two sacraments, which are not burthensome, and are of excellent use. This is the first.

II. We may learn from hence what is to be the sum and end of our preaching, to bring men to re-

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pentance and a firm belief of the gospel: but then it is to be considered, that we preach repentance, so often as we preach either against sin in general, or any particular sin or vice; and so often as we persuade to holiness in general, or to the performance of any particular duty of religion, or to the exercise of any particular grace; for repentance includes the forsaking of sin, and a sincere resolution and endeavour of reformation and obedience. And we preach repentance, so often as we insist upon such considerations and arguments, as may be powerful to deter men from sin, and to engage them to holiness. And we preach faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, so often as we declare the grounds of the Christian religion, and insist upon such arguments as tend to make it credible, and are proper to convince men of the truth and reasonableness of it; so often as we explain the mystery of Christ's incarnation, the history of his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, and the proper ends and use of these; so often as we open the method of God's grace for the salvation of sinners, the nature of the covenant between God and us, and the conditions of it, and the way how a sinner is justified and hath his sins pardoned, the nature and necessity of regeneration and sanctification; so often as we explain the precepts of the gospel, and the promises and threatenings of it, and endeavour to convince men of the equity of Christ's commands, and to assure them of the certainty of the eternal happiness which the gospel promises to them that obey it, and of the eternal misery which the gospel threatens to those that are disobedient; all this is preaching faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. This may correct the irregular humour and

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itch in many people, who are not contented with this plain and wholesome food, but must be gratified with sublime notions and unintelligible mysteries, with pleasant passages of wit, and artificial strains of rhetoric, with nice and unprofitable disputes, with bold interpretations of dark prophecies, and peremptory determinations of what will happen next year, and a punctual stating of the time when antichrist shall be thrown down, and Babylon shall fall, and who shall be employed in this work. Or, if their humour lies another way, you must apply yourself to it, by making sharp reflections upon matters in present controversy and debate; you must dip your style in gall and vinegar, and be all satire and invective against those that differ from you, and teach people to hate one another, and to fall together by the ears; and this men call gospel preaching, and speaking of seasonable truths.

Surely St. Paul was a gospel preacher, and such an one as may be a pattern to all others, and yet he did none of these; he preached what men might understand, and what they ought to believe and practise, in a plain, and unaffected, and convincing manner; he taught such things as made for peace, and whereby he might edify and build up men in their holy faith. The doctrines that he preached will never be unseasonable, that men should leave their sins, and believe the gospel, and live accordingly.

And if men must needs be gratified with disputes and controversies, there are these great controversies between God and the sinner to be stated and determined; whether this be religion, to follow our own lusts and inclinations, or to endeavour to be like God, and to be conformed to him, in goodness

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and mercy, and righteousness, and truth, and faithfulness? Whether Jesus Christ be not the Messias and Saviour of the world? Whether faith and repentance and sincere obedience be not the terms of salvation, and the necessary conditions of happiness? Whether there shall be a future judgment, when all men shall be sentenced according to their works? Whether there be a heaven and hell? Whether good men shall be eternally and unspeakably happy, and wicked men extremely and everlastingly miserable? These are the great controversies of religion, upon which we are to dispute on God's behalf against sinners. God asserts, and sinners deny these things, not in words, but, which is more emphatical and significant, in their lives and actions. These are practical controversies of faith, and it concerns every man to be resolved and determined about them, that he may frame his life accordingly.

And so for repentance; God says, repentance is a forsaking of sin, and a thorough change and amendment of life; the sinner says, that it is only a formal confession, and a slight asking of God forgiveness: God calls upon us speedily and forthwith to repent; the sinner saith, it is time enough, and it may safely be deferred to sickness or death: these are important controversies, and matters of moment. But men do not affect common truths; whereas these are most necessary: and, indeed, whatever is generally useful and beneficial, ought to be common, and not to be the less valued, but the more esteemed for being so.

And as these doctrines of faith and repentance are never unseasonable, so are they more peculiarly proper when we celebrate the holy sacrament,

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which was instituted for a solemn and standing memorial of the Christian religion, and is one of the most powerful arguments and persuasives to repentance and a good life.

The faith of the gospel doth more particularly respect the death of Christ, and therefore it is called "faith in his blood," because that is more especially the object of our faith; the blood of Christ, as it was a seal of the truth of his doctrine, so it is also a confirmation of all the blessings and benefits of the new covenant.

And it is one of the greatest arguments in the world to repentance. In the blood of Christ we may see our own guilt, and in the dreadful sufferings of the Son of God, the just desert of our sins; for "he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities:" therefore, the commemoration of his sufferings should call our sins to remembrance, the representation of his body broken should melt our hearts; and so often as we remember that his blood was shed for us, our eyes should "run down with rivers of tears;" so often as we "look upon him whom we have pierced, we should mourn over him." When the Son of God suffered, "the rocks were rent in sunder;" and shall not the consideration of those sufferings be effectual to break the most stony and obdurate heart?

What can be more proper when we come to this sacrament, than the renewing of our repentance? When we partake of this passover, we should "eat it with bitter herbs." The most solemn expressions of our repentance fall short of those sufferings which our blessed Saviour underwent for our sins. If "our head were waters, and our eyes fountains

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of tears," we could never sufficiently lament the cursed effects and consequences of those provocations which were so fatal to the Son of God.

And that our repentance may be real, it must be accompanied with the resolution of a better life; for if we return to our sins again, "we trample under foot the Son of God, and profane the blood of the covenant," and out of "the cup of salvation we drink our own damnation," and turn that which should save us into an instrument and seal of our own ruin.

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# SERMON CLIX.

[Preached on Ash Wednesday.]

## OF CONFESSING AND FORSAKING SIN, IN ORDER TO PARDON.

*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.* —PROV. xxviii. 13.

SINCE we are all sinners, and liable to the justice of God, it is a matter of great moment to our comfort and happiness, to be rightly informed, by what means, and upon what terms, we may be reconciled to God, and find mercy with him. And to this purpose the text gives us this advice and direction: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy."

In which words there is a great blessing and benefit declared and promised to sinners, upon certain conditions. The blessing and benefit promised is the mercy and favour of God, which comprehends all the happy effects of God's mercy and goodness to sinners: and the conditions upon which this blessing is promised are two—confession of our sins, and forsaking of them; and these two contain in them the whole nature of that great and necessary duty of repentance, without which a sinner can have no reasonable hopes of the mercy of God.

I. Here is a blessing or benefit promised, which is the mercy and favour of God: and this, in the

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full extent of it, comprehends all the effects of the mercy and goodness of God to sinners, and doth primarily import the pardon and forgiveness of our sins. And this, probably, Solomon did chiefly intend in this expression; for so the mercy of God doth most frequently signify in the Old Testament; viz. the forgiveness of our sins. And thus the prophet explains it: (Isa. lv. 7.) "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

But now, since the clear revelation of the gospel, the mercy of God doth not only extend to the pardon of sin, but to power against it; because this also is an effect of God's free grace and mercy to sinners, to enable them, by the grace of his Holy Spirit, to master and mortify their lusts, and to persevere in goodness to the end.

And it comprehends also our final pardon and absolution at the great day, together with the glorious reward of eternal life, which the apostle expresseth, by "finding mercy with the Lord in that day." And this likewise is promised to repentance: (Acts iii. 19.) "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, and he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you;" that is, that when Jesus Christ, who is now preached unto you, shall come, you may receive the final sentence of absolution and forgiveness.

And thus much shall suffice to have been spoken of the blessing and benefit here promised—the mercy of God; which comprehends all the blessed

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effects of the Divine grace and goodness to sinners, the present pardon of sin, and power to mortify sin, and to persevere in a good course, and our final absolution by the sentence of the great day, together with the merciful and glorious reward of eternal life.

II. We will consider, in the next place, the conditions upon which this blessing is promised; and they are two, the confessing and forsaking of our sins: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall have mercy:" and these two do contain and constitute the whole nature of repentance, without which a sinner can have no reasonable hopes to find mercy with God. I begin with the

First, The confession of our sins; by which is meant a penitent acknowledgment of our faults to God; to God, I say, because the confession of our sins to men is not, generally speaking, a condition of the forgiveness of them, but only in some particular cases, when our sins against God are accompanied and complicated with scandal and injury to men. In other cases, the confession of our sins to men is not necessary to the pardon of them, as I shall more fully shew in the progress of this discourse.

All the difficulty in this matter is, that the confession of our sins is opposed to the covering and concealing of them: "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth them shall have mercy." But no man can hope to hide his sin from God, and therefore confession of them to God cannot be here meant. But this objection, if it be of any force, quite excludeth confession to God, as no part of Solomon's meaning; when yet confession of our sins to God is granted on all hands to be a

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necessary condition of the forgiveness of them. And to take away the whole ground of this objection; men are said in Scripture, when they do not confess their sins and repent of them, to hide and conceal them from God: not to acknowledge them, is as if a man went about to cover them. And thus David opposeth confession of sins to God, to the hiding of them: (Psal. xxxii. 5.) "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." So that this is no reason why the text should not be understood of the confessing of our sins to God.

But because the necessity of confessing our sins to men (that is, to the priest), in order to the forgiveness of them, is a great point of difference between us and the church of Rome, it being by them esteemed a necessary article of faith, but by us, so far from being necessary to be believed, that we do not believe it to be true; therefore, for the clear stating of this matter, I shall briefly inquire into these two things:

I. Whether confession of our sins to the priest, as taught and practised in the church of Rome, be necessary to the forgiveness of them.

II. How far the disclosing and revealing of our sins to the ministers of God is convenient upon other accounts, and for other purposes of religion.

I. Whether confession of our sins to the priest, and the manner in which it is taught and practised in the church of Rome, be necessary to the forgiveness of them. What manner of confession this is, the council of Trent hath most precisely determined; viz. "Secret confession to the priest alone of all and every mortal sin, which, upon the most diligent

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search and examination of our consciences, we can remember ourselves to be guilty of since our baptism; together with all the circumstances of those sins, which may change the nature of them; because without the perfect knowledge of these, the priest cannot make a judgment of the nature and quality of men's sins, nor impose fitting penance for them." This is the confession of sins required in the church of Rome, which the same council of Trent, without any real ground from Scripture or ecclesiastical antiquity, doth most confidently affirm, "to have been instituted by our Lord, and by the law of God to be necessary to salvation, and to have been always practised in the catholic church."

I shall, as briefly as I can, examine both these pretences, of the Divine institution, and constant practice of this kind of confession.

First, For the Divine institution of it, they mainly rely upon three texts; in the first of which there is no mention at all of confession, much less of a particular confession of all our sins, with the circumstances of them; in the other two there is no mention of confession to the priest: and yet all this ought clearly to appear in these texts, before they can ground a Divine institution upon them; for a Divine institution is not to be founded upon obscure consequences, but upon plain words.

The first text, and the only one upon which the council of Trent grounds the necessity of confession, is John xx. 23. "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." It is a sign they were at a great loss for a text to prove it, when they are glad to bring one that hath not one word in it concerning confession, nor the least intimation of the necessity of it.

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But let us see how they manage it to their purpose. The apostles and their successors (saith Bellarmine) by this power of remitting and retaining sins, are constituted judges of the case of penitents; but they cannot judge without hearing the cause; and this infers particular confession of sins to the priest, from whence he concludes it necessary to the forgiveness of sins.

But do not the ministers of the gospel exercise this power of remitting sins in baptism? And yet particular confession of all sins to the priest is not required, no not in the church of Rome, in the baptism of adult persons. And therefore, according to them, particular confession of sin to the priest is not necessary to his exercising the power of remitting sins, and consequently the necessity of confession cannot be concluded from this text.

And to shew how they are puzzled in this matter, Vasquez, by a strange device, concludes the necessity of confession from the power of retaining sins; for (says he) if the priest have a power of retaining sins, that is, of denying pardon and absolution to the penitent, then he may impose confession as a condition of forgiveness, and not absolve the penitent upon other terms. But supposing the priest to have this unreasonable power, this makes confession no otherwise necessary by Divine institution, than going to Jerusalem or China is, in order to the forgiveness of our sins, or submitting to any other foolish condition that the priest thinks fit to require: for according to this way of reasoning, this power of retaining sins, makes every foolish thing that the priest shall impose upon the penitent, to be necessary by Divine command and institution.

But the truth is, this power of remitting and re-

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taining sins, is exercised by the ministers of the gospel, in the administration of the sacraments, and the preaching of the gospel, which is called the word of reconciliation, the ministry whereof is committed to them. And thus the ancient fathers understood it; and as a great divine told them in the council of Trent, it was, perhaps, never expounded by any one father concerning the business of confession.

The second text they allege to this purpose is, (1 John i. 9.) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Here, indeed, is confession; but general, not particular, as appears by the opposition, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: but if we confess our sins;" that is, if we acknowledge ourselves to have been sinners. And then there is not a word of confessing to the priest; the confession here meant is plainly to God, because it follows, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;" that is, God, who is necessarily understood in the former part of the sentence, as if it had run thus, "If we confess our sins to God, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

The third text is, (Jam. v. 16.) "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another." And here again there is only mention of confession, but not a word of the priest; and for another reason, if I had been to advise them, they should not have pressed this text for their service in this cause, because it does them as much hurt as good; for it is certain, the duty of confession here enjoined is reciprocal and mutual, "Confess your sins one to another:" so that if, by virtue of this text, the people are bound to confess their sins to the priest, the priest is hereby as much obliged to confess his sins

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to the people; which, I dare say, is more than they have a mind to prove from this text. The plain meaning whereof is this—that as Christians should be ready to perform all mutual offices of charity, so to assist and comfort one another by their counsel and prayers. And therefore the apostle adviseth Christians when they are sick, if at the same time they be under any spiritual trouble, by reason of the guilt of any sin lying upon their consciences, to lay open their case to one another, that so they may have the help of one another's advice and prayers; "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed," both of your bodily and spiritual distemper. Not that the priest or minister is here excluded; St. James had spoken of that particular before, that when "any was sick," he should "send for the elders of the church," that he might, in the first place, have the benefit of their counsel and prayers; and then, because private Christians may also be useful to one another in this kind, he adds, that they should also lay open their condition and troubles "to one another," that so they might have the help of one another's advice and prayers; and very probably all the confession here meant of private Christians "to one another," is of the offences and injuries they may have been guilty of one towards another; that they should be reconciled upon this occasion, and, as a testimony of their charity, should "pray one for another;" whereas they are bound "to send for the elders of the church," and they are "to pray over them," as an act, not only of charity, but of superiority, and by virtue of their office in the church, a more especial blessing being to be expected from their prayers.

These three texts are the main arguments from



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Scripture, which they, of the church of Rome, bring to prove their auricular or secret confession to be of Divine institution; and woful proofs they are; which shews what miserable shifts they are reduced to, who resolve to maintain a bad cause.

I proceed, in the second place, to discover the falsehood of their other pretences, that this kind of confession hath always been practised in the catholic church: and not only so, but believed absolutely necessary to the remission of men's sins, and their eternal salvation.

The truth of the whole matter is this; public confession and penance for open and scandalous crimes was in use, and with great strictness observed, in the first ages of Christianity; and there was then no general law, or custom, that exacted secret confession of sins to the priest, as a necessary part of repentance, and condition of forgiveness: afterward public penance was by degrees disused; which plainly shews, that, in the opinion of the church, this discipline, how useful soever, was not of absolute necessity to restore men to the favour of God.

In place of this came in private confession to the priest, particularly appointed to this office, and called the penitentiary; but, upon occasion of a scandal that happened, this also was abrogated by Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople; which shews that neither was this necessary. And this act of Nectarius was justified by his successor St. Chrysostom, who does, over and over, most expressly teach, that confession of our sins to men is not necessary to the forgiveness of them, but that it is sufficient to confess them to God alone; so that St. Chrysostom does plainly stand condemned by the decrees of the council of Trent.

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And thus, for several ages, the matter rested, till the degeneracy of the church of Rome, growing towards it height, about the ninth and tenth centuries, some began to contend for the necessity of secret confession; and this, in the year 1215, in the fourth council of Lateran, under Pope Innocent III. was decreed and established.

And this is the first public law that was made in the Christian church concerning this matter, notwithstanding all the boasts of the council of Trent, about the antiquity of this institution and practice; for Gratian, who lived about fifty years before this council, tells us, that in his time several wise and religious men were of the contrary opinion, and did not hold confession necessary by virtue of any Divine law. Afterwards, in the council of Florence, and especially in that of Trent, this decree of the council of Lateran was confirmed and enlarged in many particulars, of which I have already given some account.

And whereas they pretend for themselves, the universal practice not only of the past but present church, we are able to shew from clear testimony of their own writers, that confession, as taught and practised in the church of Rome, is no where else in use at this day, neither among the Abyssines, nor Indians of St. Thomas, nor the Nestorians, nor the Armenians, nor the Jacobites, churches of great antiquity and vast extent. And as for the Greek church, if we may believe Gratian, and the author of the gloss upon the canon law, the Greeks had anciently no tradition concerning the necessity of confession, nor do they at this day agree with the Roman church in all points concerning it.

So that, in short, there is no nation nor church throughout the whole world, that bears the name of



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Christian, the Roman church only excepted, that doth fully embrace and maintain the whole doctrine of the council of Trent, concerning confession; and yet, according to their principles, the whole is of equal necessity to be believed, as any part of it. With what face, then, do they declare, that this manner of confession always was, and still is, observed in the catholic, that is, in the whole Christian church?

I have not time to shew the great and manifold inconveniences and mischiefs of this practice: how infinite a torture it is to the consciences of men, by entangling them in endless doubts and scruples; and how great a scandal it is to the Christian profession, in the lewd management of it by the priests, is evident from the two bulls of Pope Pius IV. and Gregory XV. which mention things too shameful to be declared; not to insist upon other horrible abuses of it to the vilest and wickedest purposes; not so much to direct the consciences of men, as to dive into their secrets, of which there are so many plain and notorious instances, that they are past denial.

The other thing pretended for it is, that it is a great restraint upon men from sin. And very probably it is so to modest and well-disposed persons; but experience shews how quite contrary an effect it hath upon others, who are the far greatest part of mankind. Does not all the world see in the popish countries, in the time of their carnival, just before Lent, the anniversary season of confession, how scandalous a liberty men take of doing lewd and wicked things; and that for this very reason, because their consciences are presently to be eased and scoured (as they call it) by confession and abso-

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lution? And they therefore take the opportunity to gratify their lusts, and fill up the measure of their iniquity at that time, because with one labour they can set their consciences right, and clear them of all guilt. And they look upon this as a special piece of spiritual good husbandry, to quit their scores with God at once, that so they may have no occasion to trouble him, nor the priest, nor themselves again for a good while after. So that confession, instead of being a restraint from sin, gives great encouragement to it, by deluding men into a vain hope of obtaining the pardon of their sins from time to time, though they still continue in the practice of them; by which device, men's sins are at once remitted and retained; the priest remits them by absolution, and the penitent retains them, by going on still in the commission of them, in hope of obtaining a new absolution as often as occasion shall require. I proceed to the

II. Second inquiry, namely, How far the disclosing and revealing our sins to the ministers of God may be convenient upon other accounts, and to other purposes of religion? To which the answer is very plain and short; so far as is necessary, either to the direction, or the ease of men's consciences.

There are many cases wherein men, under the guilt and trouble of their sins, can neither appease their own minds, nor sufficiently direct themselves, without recourse to some pious and prudent guide; in these cases, men certainly do very well, and many times prevent a great deal of trouble and perplexity to themselves, by a timely discovery of their condition to some faithful minister, in order to their direction and satisfaction, without which they shall never, perhaps, be able to clear themselves of the obscurity

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and entanglement of their own minds; but, by smothering their trouble in their own breasts, shall proceed from one degree of melancholy to another, till at last they be plunged either into destruction or despair; whereas the discovery of their condition in time, would prove a present and effectual remedy. And to this purpose, a general confession is for the most part sufficient; and where there is occasion for a more particular discovery, there is no need of raking into the particular and foul circumstances of men's sins, to give that advice which is necessary for the cure and ease of the penitent; a thing so far from being desirable, that it must needs be very grievous to every modest and good man.

And thus far confession is not only allowed, but encouraged among protestants. In the Lutheran churches, Chemnitius tells us, that private general confession is in use and practice. And Calvin freely declares, that he is so far from being against people's repairing to their pastors to this purpose, that he earnestly wisheth it were every where observed before the receiving of the sacrament. And the same is the sense of our own church, laying no necessity upon men in this matter, but advising, especially before the sacrament, those who have any trouble upon their consciences, to repair to some discreet and faithful minister of God's word, for advice and satisfaction. And thus all the good use which can be made of confession may be had in our church, without the ill effects and consequences of the Romish confession, and without laying a yoke upon the consciences of men which our Saviour never laid.

And now I have, as briefly and as plainly as I could, stated this controversy between us and the

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church of Rome, concerning the necessity and use of secret confession to the ministers of God, as the proper guides and directors of our consciences. But it is granted on all hands, that confession of our sins to God is necessary; and there is no doubt but it is here intended in the text, viz. a penitent acknowledgment of our sins; the nature whereof I shall briefly explain to you.

And it must not only be a general confession that we are sinners, but there must be a particular acknowledgment of our sins to God, so far as, upon a particular discussion and examination of our consciences, we can call them to remembrance; especially our most heinous sins, which our consciences will not suffer us to forget, must be particularly acknowledged, with the several aggravations of them.

And this confession must be accompanied with such a shame and sorrow for our sins, as produceth in us a sincere resolution to leave them, and to betake ourselves to a better course. These are the principal ingredients of a penitent confession.

1. There must be a shame, without which there is no hope of amendment. Confession always supposeth conviction of a fault; and he that is truly convinced that he hath done amiss, cannot but be ashamed of what he hath done. And thus the penitents in Scripture were wont to make confession of their sins to God: (Ezra ix. 6.) "O my God, (says he) I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God." So Jeremiah; (chap. iii. 25.) "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord." And so, likewise, Daniel: (chap. ix. 5.) "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and done wickedly; unto us belongeth confusion of face." And thus our Saviour describes

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the penitent behaviour of the publican, as ashamed to look up to that God whom he had offended; (Luke xviii. 13.) "He would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven; but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

2. Confession must be always accompanied with great sorrow for our sins, considering the great dishonour we have brought to God, and the danger into which we have brought ourselves; "I will declare mine iniquity (says David), and I will be sorry for my sin."

And this sorrow must be proportionable to the degree of our sin. If we have been very wicked, and have sinned greatly against the Lord, and "have multiplied our transgressions," and continued long in an evil course, have neglected God, and "forgotten him days without number," the measure of our sorrow must bear some proportion to the degree of our sins: if they have been as scarlet and crimson (as the prophet expresseth it), that is, of a deeper die than ordinary, our sorrow must be as deep as our guilt; for it is not a slight trouble, and a few tears, that will wash out such stains.

Not that tears are absolutely necessary, though they do very well become, and most commonly accompany, a sincere repentance. All tempers are not in this alike; some cannot express their sorrow by tears, even then when they are most inwardly and sensibly grieved. But if we can easily shed tears upon other occasions, certainly "rivers of tears" ought to "run down our eyes," because we have broken God's laws, the reasonable, and righteous, and good laws of so good a God, of so gracious a sovereign, of so mighty a benefactor, of the founder of our being, and the perpetual patron and protector of our lives: but if we cannot command

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our tears, there must, however, be great trouble and contrition of spirit, especially for great sins; to be sure to that degree as to produce the

3. Third property I mention of a penitent confession; namely, a sincere resolution to leave our sins, and betake ourselves to a better course. He does not confess his fault, but stand in it, who is not resolved to amend. True shame and sorrow for our sins, is utterly inconsistent with any thought of returning to them. It argues great obstinacy and impudence to confess a fault and continue in it. Whenever we make confession of our sins to God, "surely it is meet to say unto him, I will not offend any more; that which I know not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

This is the first part of repentance mentioned in the text, the first condition of our finding mercy with God, the penitent acknowledgment of our sins to him. I proceed to the

Second condition required to make us capable of the mercy of God, which is the actual forsaking of our sins; "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy." I shall not go about to explain what is meant by forsaking sin; it is that which every body can understand, but few will do; there lies all the difficulty: I shall only put you in mind, that forsaking of sin comprehends our return to our duty, that necessarily follows from it. In sins of commission, he that hath left any vice, does thereby become master of the contrary virtue. *Virtus est vitium fugere;* not to be drunk, is to be sober; not to oppress, or defraud, or deal falsely, is to be just and honest: and for sins of omission, the forsaking of them is nothing else, but the doing of those duties which we omitted and neglected be-

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fore. And therefore what Solomon here calls forsaking of sin, is elsewhere in Scripture more fully expressed, by "ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well," (Isa. i. 16.) By forsaking our sins, and turning to God: (Isa. lv. 7.) "Let the wicked man forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." By turning from all our sins, and keeping all God's laws and statutes: (Ezek. xviii. 21.) "If the wicked will turn from all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right."

And this is a most essential part of repentance, and a necessary condition of our finding mercy with God. That part of repentance which I have mentioned and insisted upon before, the penitent acknowledgment of our sins to God, with shame and sorrow for them, and a firm purpose and resolution to leave them; all this is but preparatory to the actual forsaking of them: that which perfects and completes our repentance, is to turn from our evil ways, and to break off our sins by righteousness.

And these terms, of confessing and forsaking our sins, are reasonable in themselves, and honourable to God, and profitable to us; and upon lower terms we have no reason to expect the mercy of God, nor, in truth, are we capable of it, either by the present forgiveness of our sins, or the final absolution of the great day, and the blessed reward of eternal life. God peremptorily requires this change as a condition of our forgiveness and happiness; "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," (Acts iii. 19.) "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," (Matt. xix. 17.) "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." And why

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should any man hope for the mercy of God upon other terms than those which he hath so plainly and peremptorily declared?

It is a mean and unworthy thought of God, to imagine that he will accept men to his favour and eternal life upon other terms than of better obedience. Will any wise father or prince accept less from his children and subjects? Will they be satisfied with sighs and tears, as well as with obedience; and well-pleased if they be but melancholy for their faults, though they never mend them? We must not impute that to God, which would be a defect of wisdom and good government in any father or prince upon earth. God values no part of repentance upon any other account, but as it tends to reclaim us to our duty, and ends in our reformation and amendment.

This is that which qualifies us for the happiness of another life, and "makes us meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." And without this, though God should be pleased to forgive us, yet we could not forgive ourselves; and notwithstanding the legal discharge from guilt, the sting of it would remain, and we should, like our first parents, after they had sinned, run away and hide ourselves from God, though he spake never so kindly to us. God hath placed in every man's mind an inexorable judge, that will grant no pardon and forgiveness but to a reformed penitent, to him that hath such a sense of the evil of his past life, as to become a better man for the future.

And whoever entertains any other notion of the grace and mercy of God to sinners, confounds the nature of things, and does plainly overthrow the reason of all laws, which is to restrain men from

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sin; but when it is committed, to pardon it without amendment, is to encourage the practice of it, and to take away the reverence and veneration of those laws, which seem so severely to forbid it. So that, next to impunity, the forgiveness of men's sins upon such easy and unfit terms gives boldness and encouragement to sin, and must necessarily, in the opinion of men, lessen the honour and esteem of God's laws.

And thus I have considered and explained both the blessing and benefit which is here promised and declared, viz. the mercy and favour of God, which comprehends both the present forgiveness of our sins, and power against them, and grace to persevere in goodness to the end, and our final absolution at the great day, and the glorious and merciful reward of eternal life: and likewise the conditions upon which this blessing is promised; viz. the penitent acknowledgment of our sins to God, with such shame and sorrow for them, as produceth a sincere resolution of leaving them, and returning to a better course, and the actual forsaking of them, which involves in it our actual return to our duty, and a constant and sincere obedience to the laws of God in the future course of our lives.

I shall now make some application of this discourse to ourselves. I am sure we are all nearly concerned in it. The best of us have many sins to confess and forsake; some of us very probably have need to change the whole course of our lives, to put us into a capacity of the mercy of God. This work can never be unseasonable; but there cannot be a more proper time for it, than when we are solemnly preparing ourselves to receive the holy sacrament; in which, as we do commemorate the great mercy

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of God to mankind, so we do likewise renew and confirm our covenant with him; that holy covenant, wherein we engage ourselves to forsake our sins, as ever we expect the forgiveness of them at God's hand.

To persuade us hereto, be pleased to consider the reasonableness of the thing, the infinite benefit and advantage of it; and, which is beyond all other arguments, the absolute necessity of it, to make us capable of the mercy and forgiveness of God in this world and the other, and to deliver us from the wrath which is to come, and from those terrible storms of vengeance, which will infallibly fall upon impenitent sinners: so that we have all the reason, and all the encouragement in the world, to resolve upon a better course. Upon this condition, the mercy of God is ready to meet and embrace us; God will pardon our greatest provocations, and be perfectly reconciled to us. So he hath declared by the prophet: (Isaiah i. 16.) "Wash ye, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool." And what greater encouragement can we desire, than that, upon such easy and advantageous terms, God should be so ready to have an end put to all controversies and quarrels between him and us?

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," to take up a serious resolution, "to break off your sins by repentance," and to reform whatever, upon due search and trial of your ways, you shall find to be amiss in your lives.

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"I beseech you by the mercies of God," that mercy which naturally leads to repentance, and which "is long-suffering to us-ward," on purpose that "we may not perish, but come to repentance;" which hath spared us so often, and is not yet exhausted and tired out by our intolerable obstinacy, and innumerable provocations; that mercy which moved the Son of God to become man, to live among us, and to die for us; who now, as it were, speaks to us from the cross, extending his pierced hands, and painful arms to embrace us, and, through the gasping wounds of his side, lets us see the tender and bleeding compassion of his heart; that mercy, which, if we now despise it, we shall in vain one day implore, and catch hold of, and hang upon, to save us from sinking into eternal perdition; that mercy, which, how much soever we now presume upon, will then be so far from interposing between us and the wrath of God, that it will highly inflame and exasperate it. For whatever impenitent sinners may now think, they will then certainly find that the Divine justice, when it is thoroughly provoked, and whetted by his abused mercy and goodness, will be most terribly severe, and, like a razor set with oil, will cut the keener for its smoothness.

"Consider this all ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: consider and shew yourselves men, O ye transgressors!"

We do consider all this, (some may perhaps say) but we have been great sinners, so great, that we doubt whether our case be not already desperate.

This, if it be sensibly said, with deep sorrow and contrition, with that shame and confusion of face

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which becomes great offenders, is a good confession, and the best reason in the world, why ye should now break off your sins: for if what you have already done, do really make your case so doubtful and difficult, do not, by sinning yet more and more against the Lord, make it quite desperate and past remedy; do but you repent, and God will yet return and have mercy upon you. And do not say you cannot do it, when it must be done, or you are undone. Power and necessity go together: when men are hard pressed, they find a power which they thought they had not; and when it comes to the push, men can do that which they plainly see they either must do, or be ruined for ever.

But, after all this, I am very sensible how great a need there is of God's powerful assistance in this case, and that it is not an ordinary resolution and common measure of God's grace, that will reclaim those who have been long habituated to an evil course.

Let us, therefore, earnestly beg of him, that he would make these counsels effectual, that he would grant us repentance unto life, that he would make us all sensible of our faults, sorry for them, and resolved to amend them; and let us every one put up David's prayer to God for ourselves, "Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, that I may keep them unto the end."

I have now done; I am only to mind you of another duty, which is to accompany our repentance, and fasting, and prayer, as a testimony of the sincerity of our repentance, and one of the best means

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to make our fasting and prayer acceptable to God, and to turn away his judgments from us; and that is charity and alms to the poor, whose number is very great among us, and their necessities very pressing and clamorous, and therefore do call for a bountiful supply.

And to convince men of the necessity of this duty, and the efficacy of it in conjunction with our repentance, and fasting, and prayers, I shall only offer to your consideration a few plain texts of Scripture, which need no comment upon them. (Dan. iv. 27.) It is the prophet's advice to Nebuchadnezzar; "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquity by shewing mercy to the poor; if so be it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." (Acts x. 4.) The angel there tells Cornelius, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." (Isa. lviii. 6, &c.) "Is not this the fast which I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward: then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer thee; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am." To which I will only add that gracious promise of our Saviour; "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy;" and that terrible sentence in St. James, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy!"

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# SERMON CLX.

## OF CONFESSION, AND SORROW FOR SIN.

*I will declare mine iniquity, and be sorry for my sin.*—PSALM XXXVIII. 18.

IN this psalm David does earnestly beg mercy and forgiveness of God, and in order to the obtaining of it, he declares both his sins, and his repentance for them, in these words, which contain in them two of the necessary ingredients, or at least concomitants, of a true repentance; viz. confession of sin, and sorrow for it.

I shall speak something of the first of these, viz. confession of sin: but the second, viz. sorrow for sin, shall be the main subject of my discourse.

I. Confession of sin; "I will declare mine iniquity;" or, as it is in the old translation, "I will confess my wickedness." Of which I shall speak under these three heads:

I. What confession of sin is.

II. How far it is necessary.

III. What are the reasons and grounds of this necessity.

I. What confession of sin is. It is a declaration or acknowledgment of some moral evil or fault to another, which we are conscious to ourselves we have been guilty of. And this acknowledgment may be made by us, either to God or man. The Scripture mentions both. Confession of our sins to God is very frequently mentioned in Scripture, as the



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first and necessary part of repentance; and sometimes, and in some cases, confession to men is not only recommended but enjoined.

II. How far confession of our sins is necessary. That it is necessary to confess our sins to God, the Scripture plainly declares, and is I think a matter out of all dispute. For it is a necessary part of repentance, that we should confess our sins to God, with a due sense of the evil of them; and, therefore, the Scripture maketh this a necessary qualification and condition of pardon and forgiveness. (Prov. xxviii. 13.) "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall have mercy." (1 John i. 9.) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;" implying, that if we do not confess our sins to God, the guilt of them will still remain; to God, I say, for of confession to him St. John plainly speaks, when he says, "He is faithful and just." Who? God surely, who, though he be not named before, yet is necessarily understood in the words before; "If we confess our sins, (*i. e.* to God), he is faithful and just."

A general confession of our sins is absolutely necessary; and in some cases a particular acknowledgment of them, and repentance for them, especially if the sins have been great, and deliberate, and presumptuous; in this case a particular confession of them, and repentance for them, is necessary so far as we can particularly recollect them, and call them to remembrance: whereas, for sins of ignorance and infirmity, of surprise and daily incursion, for lesser omissions, and the defects and imperfections of our best actions and services, we have all the reason that can be to believe, that God will accept of a general confession of them, and repentance for

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them. And if any man ask me, where I find this distinction in Scripture between a general and particular repentance? I answer, that it is not necessary it should be any where expressed in Scripture, being so clearly founded in the nature and reason of the thing; because in many cases it is not possible that we should have a particular knowledge and remembrance of all our particular sins; as is plain in sins of ignorance, since our very calling them by that name does necessarily suppose that we do not know them. It is impossible we should remember those sins afterwards which we did not know when they were committed; and, therefore, either a general repentance for these and the other sins I mentioned of the like nature, must be sufficient, in order to the pardon of them; or we must say that they are unpardonable, which would be very unreasonable, because this would be to make lesser sins more unpardonable than those which are far greater.

And yet, though this difference between a general and particular repentance be no where expressly mentioned in Scripture, there does not want foundation for it there. (Psal. xix. 12.) "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret sins;" *i. e.* such as we do not discern and take notice of when they are committed. And yet David supposeth, that upon a general acknowledgment of them, and repentance for them, we may be cleansed from them, though we cannot make a particular acknowledgment of them, and exercise a particular repentance for them, because they are secret, and we do not particularly understand what they are.

As for our confessing our sins to men, both Scripture and reason do, in some cases, recommend and enjoin it. As,



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1. In order to the obtaining of the prayers of good men for us: (James v. 16.) "Confess your sins one to another;" he said before, "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." This, in all probability, is meant of the miraculous power of prayer, which St. Chrysostom reckons among the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, bestowed upon Christians in the first ages of the church: and this is very much countenanced and confirmed by what presently follows after this command, of confessing our sins one to another, and praying one for another, and given as the reason of it; for "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The original is δέησις ἐνεργουμένη, "the inspired prayer;" which, in the verse before, is called "the prayer of faith," meaning that miraculous faith, in the power whereof Christians did obtain of God whatever they were inspired to ask of him; according to our Saviour's promise in the gospel, concerning the efficacy of the prayers of Christians, which we find mentioned among the other miraculous powers which were to be conferred upon them by the coming of the Holy Ghost.

2. Confession of our sins to men is likewise reasonable, in order to the ease and satisfaction of our minds, and our being directed in our duty for the future. In this case, common reason and prudence, without any precept of Scripture, will direct men to have recourse to this remedy; viz. to discover and lay open our disease to some skilful spiritual physician; to some faithful friend, or prudent guide, in order to spiritual advice and direction, for the peace and satisfaction of our minds. And then,

3. In case our sins have been public and scanda-

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lous, both reason and the practice of the Christian church do require, that, when men have publicly offended, they should give public satisfaction and open testimony of their repentance.

But as for private and auricular confession of our sins to a priest in all cases, and as of absolute necessity to our obtaining pardon and forgiveness from God, as the church of Rome teacheth, this is neither necessary by Divine precept, nor by any constitution and practice of the ancient Christian church, as I have shewn in my former discourse.

Not to mention the bad consequence of this practice, and the impious and dangerous use which hath been made of this seal of confession, for the concealing and carrying on of the most wicked and barbarous designs, and the debauching of the penitents, by drawing them into the commission of the same and greater sins than those which they confessed, which the more devout persons of that church have frequently complained of:—I proceed now to shew briefly in the

III. Third place, the grounds and reasons of the necessity of confessing our sins to God; and I shall but just mention them.

1. From the precept and command of God; for which I have already produced clear proof of Scripture.

2. From the nature of the thing, because without this there can be no repentance towards God. He that will not so much as own the faults which he hath been guilty of, can never repent of them. If we will not confess our sins to God, we are never like to be sorry for them.—Thus much for the first thing in the text, the confession of our sins. I proceed now, to the

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Second ingredient of repentance mentioned in the text, which is sorrow for sin; "I will declare mine iniquity, and be sorry for my sin." In the handling of this argument, I shall,

I. Consider the nature of this passion of sorrow.

II. The reason and grounds of our sorrow for sin.

III. The measure and degrees of it.

IV. How far the outward expression of our inward grief by tears is necessary to a true repentance.

I. For the nature of this passion. Sorrow is a trouble or disturbance of mind, occasioned by something that is evil, done or suffered by us, or which we are in danger of suffering, that tends greatly to our damage or mischief: so that to be sorry for a thing, is nothing else but to be sensibly affected with the consideration of the evil of it, and of the mischief and inconvenience which is like to redound to us from it: which if it be a moral evil, such as sin is, to be sorry for it, is to be troubled that we have done it, and to wish with all our hearts that we had been wiser, and had done otherwise; and if this sorrow be true and real, if it abide and stay upon us, it will produce a firm purpose and resolution in us, not to do the like for the future.

It is true, indeed, that we are said to be sorry for the death and loss of friends; but this is rather the effect of natural affection than of our reason, which always endeavours to check and moderate our grief for that which we cannot help, and labours by all means to turn our sorrow into patience. And we are said, likewise, to grieve for the miseries and sufferings of others; but this is not so properly sorrow, as pity and compassion. Sorrow rather respects our-

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selves, and our own doings and sufferings. I proceed, in the

II. Second place, to inquire into the reasons and grounds of our sorrow for sin; and they, as I have already hinted, are these two—the intrinsical, or the consequent evil of sin; either the evil of sin in itself, or the mischiefs and inconveniences which it will bring upon us. For every one that is sorry for any fault he is guilty of, he is so upon one of these two accounts; either upon the score of ingenuity, or of interest; either because he hath done a thing which is unworthy in itself, or because he hath done something which may prove prejudicial to himself; either out of a principle of love and gratitude to God, or from a principle of self-love. And though the former of these be the better, the more generous principle of sorrow; yet the latter is usually the first: because it is the more sensible, and toucheth us more nearly. For sin is a base and ill-natured thing, and renders a man not so apt to be affected with the injuries he hath offered to God, as with the mischief which is likely to fall upon himself. And, therefore, I will begin with the latter, because it is usually the more sensible cause of our trouble and sorrow for sin.

1. The great mischief and inconvenience that sin is like to bring upon us. When a man is thoroughly convinced of the danger into which his sins have brought him, that they have "made him a child of wrath, and a son of perdition," that he is thereby fallen under the heavy displeasure of Almighty God, and liable to all those dreadful curses which are written in his book; that ruin and destruction hang over him, and that nothing keeps him from eternal and intolerable torments, but the patience and long-

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suffering of God, which he does not know how soon it may cease to interpose between him and the wrath of God, and let him fall into that endless and insupportable misery, which is the just portion and desert of his sins; he that lays to heart the sad estate and condition into which he hath brought himself by sin, and the mischiefs which attend him every moment of his continuance in that state, and how they are to him, and that there is but a step between him and death, and hardly another between that and hell; he cannot surely but be very sorry for what he hath done, and be highly displeased and offended with himself, that he should be the author of his own ruin, and have contributed as much as in him lies to his everlasting undoing.

2. Another and better principle of sorrow for sin, is ingenuity; because we are sensible that we have carried ourselves very unworthily towards God, and have been injurious to him, who hath laid all possible obligations upon us: for he hath made us, and hath given us our beings, and hath charged his watchful providence with the continual care of us; his bounty hath ministered to the necessities and comforts of our life; all the blessings that we enjoy, are the effects of his mere love and goodness, without any hope of requital, or expectation of any other return from us, than of love, of gratitude, and obedience; which yet are of no advantage to him, but very beneficial and comfortable to ourselves: for he does not expect duty and obedience from us, with any regard of benefit to himself, but for our sakes, and in order to our own happiness.

Nay, his kindness did not stop here, but after we had abused him by our repeated provocations, yet he still continued his care of us; and when we had

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farther provoked him to withdraw his love, and to call in his abused goodness, and had done what lay in us to make ourselves miserable, he would not suffer us to be undone, but found out a ransom for us, and hath contrived a way for the pardon of all our offences, and to reconcile us to himself, and to restore us to happiness, by the most stupendous and amazing condescension of love and goodness that ever was, even by giving his only Son to die for us.

And can we reflect upon all this, and not be sorry and grieved at our very hearts, that we should be so evil to him, who hath been so good to us; that we should be so undutiful to so loving a father, so unkind to so faithful and constant a friend, so ungrateful and unworthy to so mighty a benefactor? If any thing will melt us into tears, surely this will do it, to consider that we have sinned against him who made us, and continually preserves us, and after all our unkindness to him, did still retain so great a love for us, as to redeem us from hell and destruction by the death and suffering of his Son, and notwithstanding all our offences, does still offer us pardon and peace, life and happiness? Such considerations as these, seriously laid to heart, should, one would think, break the hardest heart, and make tears to gush even out of a rock. I proceed, in the

III. Third place, to consider the measure and degree of our sorrow for sin. That it admits of degrees, which ought to bear some proportion to the heinousness of our sins, and the several aggravations of them, and the time of our continuance in them, is out of all dispute: for though the least sin be a just cause of the deepest sorrow, yet, because our greatest grief can never bear a due proportion to the

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vast and infinite evil of sin, God is pleased to require and accept such measures of sorrow as do not bear an exact correspondence to the malignity of sin, provided they be according to the capacity of our nature, and in some sort proportioned to the degree and aggravations of our sin: *i. e.* though the highest degree of our sorrow doth necessarily fall below the evil of the least sin, yet God requires that we should be more deeply affected with some sins than others.

But what is the lowest degree which God requires in a true penitent, and will accept, as it is impossible for me to tell, so it is unprofitable for any body to know: for no man can reasonably make this inquiry with any other design, than that he may learn how he may come off with God upon the cheapest and easiest terms. Now there cannot be a worse sign that a man is not truly sensible of the great evil of sin than this, that he desires to be troubled for it as little as may be, and no longer than needs must: and none surely are more unlikely to find acceptance with God, than those who deal so nearly, and endeavour to drive so hard a bargain with him.

And therefore I shall only say this in general, concerning the degrees of our sorrow for sin; that sin being so great an evil in itself, and of so pernicious a consequence to us, it cannot be too much lamented and grieved for by us: and the more and greater our sins have been, and the longer we have continued and lived in them, they call for so much the greater sorrow, and deeper humiliation from us: for the reasoning of our Saviour concerning Mary Magdalen, "She loved much, because much was forgiven her," is proportionably true in this case—those who have sinned much, should sorrow the more.

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And then we must take this caution along with us, that if we would judge aright of the truth of our sorrow for sin, we must not measure it so much by the degrees of sensible trouble and affliction, as by the rational effects of it, which are hatred of sin, and a fixed purpose and resolution against it for the future: for he is most truly sorry for his miscarriage, who looks upon what he hath done amiss with abhorrence and detestation of the thing, and wisheth he had not done it, and censures himself severely for it, and thereupon resolves not to do the like again. And this is the character which St. Paul gives of a godly sorrow, (2 Cor. vii. 10.) that it "worketh repentance," μετάνοιαν, it produceth a real change in our minds, and makes us to alter our purpose and resolution: and though such a person may not be so passionately and sensibly afflicted for sin, yet it appears, by the effect, that he hath a deeper and more rational resentment of the evil of it, than that man who is sad and melancholy, and drooping for never so long a time, and after all returns to his former sinful course; the degree of his sorrow may appear greater, but the effect of it is really less.

IV. As for the outward expressions of our grief and sorrow. The usual sign and outward expression of sorrow is tears; but these being not the substance of our duty, but an external testimony of it, which some tempers are more unapt to than others; we are much less to judge of the truth of our sorrow for sin by these, than by our inward sensible trouble and affliction of spirit. Some persons are of a more tender and melting disposition, and can command their tears upon a little occasion, and upon very short warning; and such persons that can weep for every thing else that troubles them, have much

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more reason to suspect the truth of their sorrow for sin, if this outward expression of it be wanting. And we find, in Scripture, that the sorrow of true penitents does very frequently discover itself by this outward sign of it. Thus, when Ezra and the people made confession of their sins to God, it is said, that "they wept very sore," (Ezra x.) Peter, when he reflected upon that great sin of denying his master, it is said, "he went forth and wept bitterly." David also was abundant in this expression of his grief. In the Book of Psalms he speaks frequently of his sighs and groans, and of watering his couch with his tears: yea, so sensibly was he affected with the evil of sin, that he could shed tears plentifully for the sins of others: (Psal. cxix. 136.) "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." In like manner, Jeremiah tells us, that his soul did weep in secret places, for the pride and obstinacy of the Jews; that his "eye did weep sore, and run down with tears," (Jer. xiii. 17.) And so likewise St. Paul: (Phil. iii. 18.) "There are many that walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies even to the cross of Christ." And there seems to be this natural reason for it, that all great and permanent impressions upon the mind, all deep inward resentments, have usually a proportionable effect upon the body and the inferior faculties.

But though this happen very frequently, yet it is not so constant and certain; for all men have not the same tenderness of spirit, nor are equally prone to tears: nay, though a man can weep upon natural accounts, as upon the loss of a child, or near relation, or an intimate friend, or when he lies under a sharp bodily pain, yet a man may truly repent,

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though he cannot express his sorrow for sin the same way, provided he give testimony of it by more real effects: and therefore the rule, which is commonly given by casuists in this case, seems to be more ensnaring than true and useful; namely, "That that man that can shed tears upon account of any evil less than that of sin (as certainly all natural evils are), ought to question the truth of his repentance for any sin that he hath committed, if he cannot shed tears for it." This I think is not true, because there is scarce any man of so hard and unrelenting a spirit, but the loss of a kind father, or a dear child, or other near relation, will force tears from him; and yet such a man, if it were to save his soul, may not be able at some times to shed a tear for his sins. And the reason is obvious; because tears do proceed from a sensitive trouble, and are commonly the product of a natural affection; and therefore it is no wonder, if they flow more readily and easily upon a natural account; because they are the effect of a cause suitable to their nature. But sorrow for sin, which hath more of the judgment and understanding in it, hath not its foundation in natural affection, but in reason; and therefore may not many times express itself in tears, though it may produce greater and more proper effects.

So that, upon the whole matter, I see no reason to call in question the truth and sincerity of that man's sorrow and repentance, who hates sin and forsakes it, and returns to God and his duty, though he cannot shed tears, and express the bitterness of his soul for his sin, by the same significations that a mother doth in the loss of her only son. He that cannot weep like a child may resolve like a man, and that undoubtedly will find acceptance with God. A learned divine

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hath well illustrated this matter by this similitude: Two persons walking together espy a serpent; the one shrieks and cries out at the sight of it, the other kills it: so it is in sorrow for sin; some express it by great lamentation and tears, and vehement transports of passions; others by greater and more real effects of hatred and detestation, by forsaking their sins, and by mortifying and subduing their lusts: but he that kills it does certainly best express his inward displeasure and enmity against it.

The application I shall make of what hath been said upon this argument, shall be in two particulars:

I. By way of caution, and that against a double mistake about sorrow for sin.

1. Some look upon trouble and sorrow for sin as the whole of repentance.

2. Others exact from themselves such a degree of sorrow as ends in melancholy, and renders them unfit both for the duties of religion, and of their particular calling. The first concerns almost the generality of men; the latter but a very few in comparison.

1. There are a great many who look upon trouble and sorrow for their sins as the whole of repentance, whereas it is but an introduction to it. It is that which works repentance; but it is not repentance itself. Repentance is always accompanied with sorrow for sin; but sorrow for sin does not always end in true repentance: sorrow only respects sins past; but repentance is chiefly preventive of sin for the future. And God doth therefore require our sorrow for sin, in order to our forsaking of it. (Heb. vi. 1.) Repentance is therefore called "repentance from dead works." It is not only a sorrow for them, but a turning from them.

There is no reason why men should be so willing

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to deceive themselves, for they are like to be the losers by it: but so we see it is, that many men are contented to be deceived to their own ruin; and among many other ways which men have to cheat themselves, this is none of the least frequent, to think that if they can but shed a few tears for sin upon a death-bed, which no doubt they may easily do, when they see their friends weeping about them, and apprehend themselves to be in imminent danger, not only of death, but of that which is most terrible, the heavy displeasure and the fiery indignation of Almighty God, into whose hands "it is a fearful thing to fall:" I say, they think that if they can but do thus much, God will accept this for true repentance, and hereupon grant them pardon and eternal life. And upon these fond hopes, they adjourn their repentance, and the reformation of their lives, to a dying hour.

Indeed, if I were to speak to a man upon his death-bed, I would encourage him to a great contrition and sorrow for his sins, as his last and only remedy, and the best thing he can do at that time; but, on the other hand, when I am speaking to those that are well and in health, I dare not give them the least encouragement to venture their souls upon this, because it is a hazardous and almost desperate remedy; especially when men have cunningly and designedly contrived to rob God of the service of their lives, and to put him off with a few unprofitable sighs and tears at their departure out of the world. Our Saviour tells us, that it is "not every one that shall say unto him, Lord! Lord! that shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and that there is a time when "many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able."

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The sum of this caution is, that men should take heed of mistaking sorrow for sin for true repentance, unless it be followed with the forsaking of sin and the real reformation of our lives. Ahab humbled himself, but we do not find that he was a true penitent. Judas was sorry for his sin, and yet for all that was "the son of perdition." Esau is a sad type of an ineffectual sorrow for sin: (Heb. xii.) where the apostle tells us, that "he found no place for repentance," that is, no way to change the mind of his father Isaac, "though he sought it carefully with tears." If sorrow for sin were repentance, there would be store of penitents in hell: for there is the deepest and most intense sorrow, "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

2. Another mistake which men ought to be cautioned against in this matter, is, of those who exact from themselves such a degree of sorrow for sin, as ends in deep melancholy, as renders them unfit both for the duties of religion, and of their particular callings. But because there are but very few who fall into this mistake, I shall need to say the less to it. This only I shall say, that those who indulge their sorrow to such a degree, as to drown their spirits, and to sink them into melancholy and mopishness, and thereby render themselves unserviceable to God, and unfit for the necessities of this life, they commit one sin more to mourn for, and overthrow the end of repentance by the indiscreet use of the means of it. For the end of sorrow for sin, is the forsaking of it and returning to our duty: but he that sorrows for sin, so as to unfit him for his duty, defeats his own design, and destroys the end he aims at.

II. The other part of the application of this discourse should be, to stir up this affection of sorrow

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in us. And here, if I had time, I might represent to you the great evil of sin, and the infinite danger and inconvenience of it. If the holy men in Scripture, David, and Jeremiah, and St. Paul, were so deeply affected with the sins of others, as to shed rivers of tears at the remembrance of them; how ought we to be touched with the sense of our own sins, who are equally concerned in the dishonour brought to God by them, and infinitely more in the danger they expose us to! Can we weep for our dead friends; and have we no sense of that heavy load of guilt, of that body of death, which we carry about with us? Can we be sad and melancholy for temporal losses and sufferings, and "refuse to be comforted;" and is it no trouble to us to have lost heaven and happiness, and to be in continual danger of the intolerable sufferings and endless torments of another world?

I shall only offer to your consideration, the great benefit and advantage which will redound to us from this godly sorrow; "it worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of," saith St. Paul. If we would thus "sow in tears," we should "reap in joy." This sorrow would but continue for a time, and in the morning of the resurrection there would be joy to all eternity, "Joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is but a very little while, and these days of mourning will be accomplished; and then "all tears shall be wiped from our eyes; and the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Sion with songs, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted: but woe unto you that laugh, for ye shall mourn and weep." If men will rejoice in the pleasures of sin, "and walk



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in the ways of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes;" if they will remove sorrow from their heart, and put away all sad and melancholy thoughts from them, and are resolved to harden their spirits against the sense of sin, against the checks and convictions of their own consciences, and the suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, against all the arguments that God can offer, and all the methods that God can use to bring them to repentance; let them "know, that for all these things God will bring them into judgment;" and, because they would not give way to a timely and seasonable sorrow for sin, they shall lie down in eternal sorrow; "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth shall be their portion for ever." From which sad and miserable estate, beyond all imagination, and past all remedy, God of his infinite goodness deliver us all, for Jesus Christ his sake.

To whom, &c.

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# SERMON CLXI.

## THE UNPROFITABLENESS OF SIN IN THIS LIFE, AN ARGUMENT FOR REPENTANCE.

*He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*—JOB xxxiii. 27, 28.

THE great folly and perverseness of human nature is in nothing more apparent than in this, that when in all other things men are generally led and governed by their interests, and can hardly be imposed upon by any art, or persuaded by any solicitation, to act plainly contrary to it; yet, in matter of their sin and duty, that is, in that which of all other is of greatest concernment to them, they have little or no regard to it; but are so blinded and bewitched with "the deceitfulness of sin," as not to consider the infinite danger and disadvantage of it; and at the same time to cast the commandments of God, and the consideration of their own happiness behind their backs.

And of this every sinner, when he comes to himself, and considers what he hath done, is abundantly convinced; as appears by the confession and acknowledgment, which is here in the text put into the mouth of a true penitent: "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not," &c.

In which words here is a great blessing and bene-



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fit promised on God's part, and a condition required on our part.

First, The blessing or benefit promised on God's part, which is deliverance from the ill consequences and punishment of sin; "he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light;" that is, he will deliver him from death and damnation. And though, perhaps, temporal death be here immediately intended, yet that is a type of our deliverance from eternal death: which is expressly promised in the gospel.

Secondly, Here is the condition required on our part: "If any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." In which words there are contained,

I. A penitent confession of our sins to God; for "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned;" that is, make a penitent confession of his sin to God.

II. A true contrition for our sin; not only for fear of the pernicious consequences of sin, and the punishment that will follow it, implied in these words, "and it profited me not," this is but a very imperfect contrition; but from a just sense of the evil nature of sin, and the fault and offence of it against God, that we have done contrary to right and our duty. "If any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right." Here you see that true and perfect contrition for our sins, is made a necessary condition of the blessing and benefit here promised; viz. deliverance from the punishment due to them.

III. Here is a description of the evil nature of sin, it is a perverting of that which is right. Sin is a perverting of the constitution and appointment of God, and of the nature and order of things. God

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hath given man a law and rule to walk by, but "the foolishness of man perverteth his way." The great lines of our duty are plain and visible to all men; and if we would attend to the direction of our own minds, concerning good and evil, every man would be a law to himself. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." That which is right, and just, and good, is plain and obvious, and offers itself first to us; and whenever we sin, we go out of the right way that lies plain before us, and "turn aside into crooked paths." But when we do that which is right, we act agreeably to the design and frame of our beings, and comply with the true nature and order of things; we do what becomes us, and are what we ought to be: but sin perverts the nature of things, and puts them out of course; "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right."

IV. You have here an acknowledgment of the mischievous and pernicious consequences of sin: "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." Which last words are a μείωσις, in which much less is said than is meant and intended: "It profited me not," that is, it was so far from being of advantage, that the effects and consequences of it were very pernicious and destructive.

And this is not only true as to the final issue and event of an evil course in the other world, but I shall endeavour to shew, that even in respect of this world, and the present life, the practice of some sins is plainly mischievous to the temporal interests of men; that others are wholly unprofitable; and that those which pretend to bring some benefit and advantage, will, when all accounts are cast up, and all circumstances duly weighed and considered, be found to do far otherwise.

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First, I shall shew that the practice of some vices is evidently mischievous and prejudicial to us, as to this world; as, all those vices which fall under the cognizance of human laws, and are punished by them, murder, theft, perjury, sedition, rebellion, and the like; these cannot be denied to be of pernicious consequence to men, and therefore the great patrons of vice seldom plead for these; the inconvenience of them is so palpable, that some feel it, and all may see it every day.

But besides these, there are many other sorts of sin which human laws either take no notice of, or do not so severely punish, which yet, in their natural consequences, are very pernicious to our present interest; either they are a disturbance to our minds, or dangerous to our health, or ruinous to our estate, or hurtful to our reputation, or it may be at once prejudicial to us in all, or most of these respects; and these are the greatest temporal inconveniences that men are liable to.

All irregular passions, as wrath, malice, envy, impatience, and revenge, are not only a disturbance to ourselves, but they naturally draw upon us hatred and contempt from others. Any one of these passions is enough to render a man uneasy to himself, and to make his conversation disgustful and troublesome to all that are about him; for all men naturally hate all those who are of an envious, or malicious, or revengeful temper, and are apt to rise up and stand upon their guard against them. Anger and impatience are great deformities of the mind, and make a man look as ugly as if he had a wry and distorted countenance; and these passions are apt to breed in others a secret contempt of us, and to bring our prudence into question, because they are

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signs of a weak and impotent mind, that either hath lost, or never had, the government of itself.

There are other vices which are plainly pernicious to our health, and do naturally bring pains and diseases upon men; such are intemperance and lust: and though some may pretend to govern themselves in the practice of these with so much moderation and discretion, as to prevent the notorious bad consequences of them, yet there are very few or none that do so: this is seldom more than a speculation, and men that allow themselves in any lewd or intemperate course, will find it very hard to govern themselves in it; for after men have forfeited their innocence, and broke in upon their natural modesty, they are apt by degrees to grow profligate and desperate. If a man gives way but little to his own vicious inclinations, they will soon get head of him, and no man knows how far they will hurry him at last.

Besides that, the vices I am speaking of, intemperance and lust, have other great inconveniences attending them, they expose men more frequently than most other vices, to occasions of quarrel, in which men often lose their own lives, or take away other men's, by which they fall under the danger of the law, and the stroke of public justice; or, if they escape that (as too often they do) they cannot fly from their own consciences, which do commonly fill them with the horror and torment of such an action all their days; so pernicious are the usual consequences of these vices, of which we see sad instances every day.

Nor are these vices less hurtful to men's estates, for they are extremely expensive and wasteful, and usually make men careless of all their business and

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concernments, liable to be cheated by those whom they are forced to trust with their affairs, because they will not mind them themselves, and be abused by crafty men, who watch the opportunities of their folly and weakness, to draw them into foolish bargains. It is an old observation, that more men perish by intemperance than by the sword; and I believe it is as true, that more estates are dissipated and wasted by these two riotous vices, than by all other accidents whatsoever.

And there is scarce any notorious vice, by which men do not greatly suffer in their reputation and good name, even when the times are worst and most degenerate: any wicked course, whether of debauchery or injustice, is a blemish to a man's credit, not only in the esteem of the sober and virtuous, but even of those who are loose and extravagant; for men are sooner brought to practise what is bad, than to approve of it, and do generally think all sin and wickedness to be a stain upon them, whatever in a swaggering humour they may say to the contrary. A clear evidence of this is, that men do so studiously endeavour to conceal their vices, and are so careful that as few as may be should be conscious to them, and are so confounded if they be discovered, and so out of all patience when they are upbraided with them; a plain acknowledgment that these things are shameful in themselves, and, whatever face men may put upon things, that they do inwardly, and at the bottom of their hearts, believe that these practices are deservedly of bad reputation, and do, in the general opinion of mankind, leave a blot upon them.

Secondly, There are other sins, which, though they are not usually attended with consequences so

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palpably mischievous, yet are plainly unprofitable, and bring no manner of advantage to men.

Of this sort is all kind of profaneness, and customary swearing in common conversation; there is neither profit nor pleasure in them. What doth the profane man get by his contempt of religion? He is neither more respected, nor better trusted, for this quality; but, on the contrary, it is many times really to his prejudice, and brings a great odium upon him, not only from those who sincerely love religion, but from others also; though they are conscious to themselves that they do not love religion as they ought, yet they have a veneration for it, and cannot endure that any one should speak slightly of it.

And it is as hard to imagine where the pleasure of profaneness lies. Men cannot but at first have a great reluctancy in their minds against it, and must offer considerable violence to themselves, to bring themselves to it; and when it is grown more familiar, and their consciences are become more seared and insensible, yet, whenever they are alone and serious, or when any affliction or calamity is upon them, they are full of fears and anguish, their guilt stares them in the face, and their consciences are raging and furious.

And as all kind of profaneness is unprofitable, so more especially customary swearing in ordinary conversation, upon every occasion of passion, or any other trivial cause; nay, it may be without cause, out of mere habit and custom. Now what can possibly be imagined to be the profit or pleasure of this vice? Sensual pleasure in it there can be none, because it is not founded in the temper of the body; a man may be naturally prone to anger

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or lust; but no man, I think, is born with a swearing constitution.

And there is as little profit as pleasure in it; for the common and trivial use of oaths makes them perfectly insignificant to their end, and is so far from giving credit to a man's word, that it rather weakens the reputation of it.

Thirdly, Those vices which pretend to be of advantage to us, when all accompts are cast up, and all circumstances duly considered, will be found to be quite otherwise. Some vices pretend to bring in profit, others to yield pleasure; but upon a thorough examination of the matter, these pretences will vanish and come to nothing.

The vices which pretend to be most profitable are covetousness and oppression, fraud and falsehood, and perfidiousness: but if we look well into them, we shall find, that either they do not bring the advantages they pretend to bring, or that the inconveniences which attend them are as great, or greater than the advantages they bring; or else that the practice of the opposite virtues would be of much greater advantage to us.

1. Some of these vices do not bring the advantages they pretend to do. Covetousness may increase a man's estate, but it adds nothing to his happiness and contentment: for though his estate grow never so much, his want is still as great as it was before, and his care and trouble continually greater; so that so long as he continues covetous, the more rich, the less happy.

And then, for fraud and falsehood; they are not of that real and lasting advantage, that cunning but short-sighted men are apt to imagine. Nothing is truer than that of Solomon; "The lying tongue is

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but for a moment." A man can practise the arts of falsehood and deceit but for a little while, before they will be discovered; and when they are discovered, they are so far from being any advantage to him, that they turn to his prejudice, and the cunning man begins to be in a bad case, and he that was wont to overreach others, is at last caught himself.

2. Several of these vices are attended with inconveniences as great or greater than the advantages they bring. If a man increase his estate by injustice and oppression, yet he loseth his reputation. Besides that, all fraudulent and unjust courses are apt to entangle a man in a great many inconveniences, and to expose him to troublesome suits, for the keeping of what he hath unjustly gotten; it is very often seen, that what is gotten by injustice is spent in law; and though it may be those whom he hath wronged never recover their right, yet first or last the unjust man is put to more trouble and vexation about it than the thing is worth. This Solomon observes: (Prov. xv. 6.) "In the revenue of the wicked there is trouble."

The perfidious man, by betraying a friend or a trust, may, perhaps, make some present advantage: but then, by such villany, he makes himself odious to all mankind, and by this means, at one time or other, prevents himself of greater advantages which he might have had another way; and, perhaps, at last, is miserably crushed by those whom he betrayed, who, in the change and revolution of human affairs, may, some time or other, have the opportunity of being revenged. Or else,

3. The practice of the opposite virtues would be of far greater advantage to us.

Truth and fidelity are in common experience

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found to be a better and surer way of thriving, and more like to last and hold out, than fraud and falsehood; and as honesty is a surer way of raising an estate, so it brings along with it greater security of the quiet enjoyment of it. There is never any real occasion, and seldom any colour and pretence, of bringing such a man into trouble; for which reason Solomon says, "Better is the little which the righteous man hath, than great possessions without right:" because, though it be but little, yet it will wear like steel, and he is like to enjoy it quietly, and may increase it; whereas the unjust man is continually in danger of losing what he hath gotten.

And if this be the case, it is very plain, that those vices which pretend to bring the greatest advantage, are really unprofitable; and to these kind of vices the text seems to point more particularly; "If any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not," &c.

But, perhaps, though there be no profit in any sinful course, yet there may be some pleasure. That comes next to be examined; and I doubt not to make it evident, that there is no such pleasure in sin, as can make it a reasonable temptation to any man to venture upon it. The vices which pretend to bring the greatest pleasure, are lewdness, and intemperance, and revenge.

The two first of these are the highest pretenders to pleasure: but God knows, and the sinner himself knows, how thin and transitory this pleasure is, how much trouble attends it, and how many sighs and groans follow it; and whatever pleasure they may minister to the sense, they bring a great deal of anguish and perplexity to the mind; so that the trouble which they cause does more than countervail

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the pleasure which they bring; and they do not only disturb the mind, but they disease the body. How many are there, who, for the gratifying of an inordinate lust, and for the incomprehensible pleasure of a drunken fit, have endured the violent burnings of a fever, or else have consumed the remainder of their days in languishing sickness and pain?

And the reason of all this is plain, because all the pleasures of sin are violent, and forced, and unnatural, and therefore not like to continue; they are founded in some disease and distemper of our minds, and therefore always end in pain and smart.

And as for revenge, it is indeed a very eager and impatient desire: but so far surely from being a pleasure, that the very thoughts of it are extremely troublesome, and raise as great storms in the mind of a man, as any passion whatsoever; and I never heard of the pleasure of being in a storm; it is pleasant indeed to be out of it, when others are in it. And when revenge hath satisfied itself, and laid its enemy bleeding at its foot, the man that executed it commonly repents himself the next moment, and would give all the world to undo what he hath done; so that if there be any pleasure in revenge, it is so flitting, and of so short a continuance, that we know not where to fix it; for there is nothing but tumult and rage before the execution of it, and after it nothing but remorse and horror; so that if it be a pleasure, it is but of one moment's continuance, and lasts no longer than the act is a-doing; and what man in his wits would purchase so short a pleasure at so dear a price? This is most certainly true, and if it were well considered, sufficient to

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convince any reasonable man of the unreasonableness of this passion.

Cain is a fearful instance of this kind, who, after he had drawn his brother into the field and slain him there, how was he tormented with the guilt of what he had done, and forced to cry out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" or (as some translations render the words) "mine iniquity is greater than that it can be forgiven!" (Gen. iv. 13.) "From thy face (says he to God, in the anguish of his soul) shall I be hid, and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me," (ver. 14.) "Every one that findeth me;" how fearful did his guilt make him! when probably there was then but one man in the world besides himself. And I may say of this sort of men as St. Jude does of those in his time, (Jude 11.) "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain;" they are guilty of his crime, and his doom shall be theirs.

And here I cannot but take notice of a great evil that grows daily upon us, and therefore deserves with the greatest severity to be discountenanced and punished: I mean that of duels, than which what can be more unchristian? And what can be more unreasonable, than for men, upon deliberation, and after the heat of passion is over, to resolve to sheath their swords in one another's bowels, only for a hasty word? And, which is yet more unreasonable, that because two men are angry, and have quarrelled with one another, and will fight it out, that therefore two more, who have no quarrel, no kind of displeasure against one another, must fight too, and kill one another if they can, for no reason, and upon no provocation. These false rules of honour

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will not pass in another world, in the highest and greatest court of honour, from whence there is no appeal.

I shall conclude this whole argument with that excellent saying of Cato, reported in A. Gellius: *Cogitate cum animis vestris*, &c. "Consider (says he) with yourselves, if ye be at any trouble and pain to do a good action, the trouble will be soon over; but the pleasure and comfort of what ye have done well, abides with you all your days: but if, to gratify yourselves, you do any thing that is wicked, the pleasure will quickly vanish; but the guilt of it will stick by you for ever."

And is it not then much better to prevent all this trouble, by denying ourselves these sinful pleasures, which will follow us with guilt whilst we live, and fill us with horror and despair when we come to die?

I shall now make some reflections upon what has been delivered, and so conclude.

First, What has been said upon this argument ought particularly to move those who have so great a consideration of this present life, and the temporal happiness of it, that the practice of all virtues is a friend to their temporal, as well as eternal welfare, and all vice is an enemy to both.

Secondly, This likewise takes off all manner of excuse from sin and vice. It pretends not to serve the soul, and to profit our future happiness in another world; and if it be an enemy also to our present welfare in this world, what is there to be said for it?

Thirdly, (which I desire to insist a little longer upon) all the arguments which I have used to convince men of the folly of a wicked course, are so many strong and unanswerable reasons for repent-

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ance; for when a man is convinced that he hath done foolishly, and to his own prejudice, that he hath sinned, and that it profited him not, what can he do less, than to be heartily sorry for it, and ashamed of it, and resolved to do better for the future? Nothing surely is more reasonable than repentance; and yet how hard is it to bring men to it? Either men will mistake the nature of it, and not do it effectually; or they will delay it, and not do it in time.

I. Men mistake the nature of repentance; and there are two great mistakes about it.

1. Of those who make the great force and virtue of it to consist, not so much in the resolution of the penitent, as in the absolution of the priest. And this the church of Rome, in their doctrine concerning repentance, does. For their sacrament of penance (as they call it) they make to consist of two parts: the matter of it, which consists in these three acts of the penitent, confession, contrition, and satisfaction; and the form of it, which is the absolution of the priest, in which they make the main virtue and force of repentance to consist; *In quâ præcipue ipsius vis sita est*, are the very words of the council of Trent.

And here is a wide difference betwixt us; for though the comfort of the penitent may, in some case, consist in the absolution of the priest, yet the virtue and efficacy of repentance does not at all consist in it, but wholly in the contrition and sincere resolution of the penitent, as the Scripture every where declares: and to think otherwise is of dangerous consequence; because it encourageth men to hope for the benefit of repentance, that is, the pardon and forgiveness of their sins, without having

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truly repented. And, indeed, the council of Trent have so framed their doctrines in this point, that any one may see, that they did not matter how much they abated on the part of the penitent, provided the power of the priest be but advanced, and kept up in its full height.

2. The other mistake is of those who make repentance to consist in the bare resolution of amendment, though it never has its effect; that is, though the sinner either do not what he resolved, or do it only for a fit, and during his present trouble and conviction.

There is one case indeed, and but one, wherein a resolution not brought to effect is available, and that is, when nothing hinders the performance and execution of it, but only want of time and opportunity for it, when the repentance is sincere, and the resolution real, but the man is cut off between the actual reformation which he intended, and which God, who sees things certainly in their causes, knows would have followed, if the man had lived to give demonstration of it. But this is nothing to those who have the opportunity to make good their resolution, and do not; for, because the resolution which would have been performed, had there been time and opportunity, is reckoned for a true repentance, and accepted of God, as if it had been done; therefore the resolution which was not brought to effect when there was time and opportunity for it, hath not the nature of true repentance, nor will it be accepted of God.

I will add but one thing more upon this head, because I doubt it is not always sufficiently considered; and that is this, that a sincere resolution of a better course, does imply a resolution of the



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means, as well as of the end: he that is truly resolved against any sin, is likewise resolved against the occasions and temptations that would lead and draw him to it; otherwise he hath taken up a rash and foolish resolution, which he is not like to keep, because he did not resolve upon that which was necessary to the keeping of it. So he that resolves upon any part of his duty, must likewise resolve upon the means which are necessary to the discharge and performance of it; he that is resolved to be just in his dealing, and to pay his debts, must be diligent in his calling, and mind his business; because without this he cannot do the other; for nothing can be more vain and fond, than for a man to pretend that he is resolved upon doing his duty, when he neglects any thing that is necessary to put him into a capacity, and to further him in the discharge of it. This is as if a man should resolve to be well, and yet never take physic, or be careless in observing the rules which are prescribed in order to his health. So, for a man to resolve against drunkenness, and yet to run himself upon the temptations which naturally lead to it, by frequenting the company of lewd and intemperate persons, this is as if a man should resolve against the plague, and run into the pest-house. Whatever can reasonably move a man to be resolved upon any end, will, if his resolution be wise and honest, determine him as strongly to use the means which are proper and necessary to that end.

These are the common mistakes about this matter, which men are the more willing to run into, because they are loath to be brought to a true repentance, the nature whereof is not difficult to be understood (for nothing in the world is plainer),

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only men are always slow to understand what they have no mind to put in practice. But,

II. Besides these mistakes about repentance, there is another great miscarriage in this matter, and that is, the delay of repentance; men are loath to set about it, and therefore they put it upon the last hazard, and resolve then to huddle it up as well as they can; but this certainly is great folly, to be still making more work for repentance, because it is to create so much needless trouble and vexation to ourselves: it is to go on still in playing a foolish part, in hopes to retrieve all by an after-game; this is extremely dangerous, because we may certainly sin, but it is not certain we shall repent; our repentance may be prevented, and we may be cut off in our sins; but if we should have space for it, repentance may, in process of time, grow a hundred times more difficult than it is at present.

But if it were much more certain and more easy than it is, if it were nothing but a hearty sorrow and shame for our sins, and an asking God forgiveness for them, without being put to the trouble of reforming our wicked lives, yet this were great folly, to do those things which will certainly grieve us after we have done them, and put us to shame, and to ask forgiveness for them. It was well said of old Cato, *Næ tu stultus es homuncio, qui malis veniam precari, quam non peccare;* "Thou art a foolish man indeed, who choosest rather to ask forgiveness than not to offend."

At the best, repentance implies a fault; it is an after-wisdom, which supposeth a man first to have played the fool; it is but the best end of a bad business; a hard shift, and a desperate hazard, which



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a man that had acted prudently would never have been put to; it is a plaster after we have dangerously wounded ourselves: but certainly it had been much wiser to have prevented the danger of the wound, and the pain of curing it. A wise man would not make himself sick if he could; or if he were already so, would not make himself sicker, though he had the most effectual and infallible remedy in the world in his power: but this is not the case of a sinner, for repentance as well as faith is the gift of God.

Above all, let me caution you not to put off this great and necessary work to the most unseasonable time of all other, the time of sickness and death, upon a fond presumption, that you can be reconciled to God when you please, and exercise such a repentance as will make your peace with him at any time.

I am heartily afraid that a very great part of mankind do miscarry upon this confidence, and are swallowed up in the gulf of eternal perdition with this plank in their arms. The common custom is (and I fear it is too common), when the physician has given over his patient, then, and not till then, to send for the minister; not so much to inquire into the man's condition, and to give him suitable advice, as to minister comfort, and to speak peace to him at a venture.

But let me tell you, that herein you put an extreme difficult task upon us, in expecting that we should pour wine and oil into the wound before it be searched, and speak smooth and comfortable things to a man that is but just brought to a sense of the long course of a lewd and wicked life impenitently continued in. Alas! what comfort can we give to men in such a case? We are loath to

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drive them to despair, and yet we must not destroy them by presumption; pity and good-nature do strongly tempt us to make the best of their case, and to give them all the little hopes which with any kind of reason we can, and God knows it is but very little that we can give to such persons, upon good ground; for it all depends upon the degree and sincerity of their repentance, which God only knows, and we can but guess at. We can easily tell them what they ought to have done, and what they should do if they were to live longer, and what is the best that they can do in those straits into which they have brought themselves; viz. to exercise as deep a sorrow and repentance for their sins as is possible, and "to cry mightily to God" for mercy, in and through the merit of our blessed Saviour. But how far this will be available in these circumstances we cannot tell; because we do not know whether, if the man had lived longer, this repentance and these resolutions, which he now declares of a better course, would have been good.

And after all is done that can be done in so short a time, and in such circumstances of confusion and disorder as commonly attend dying persons, I doubt the result of all will be this: that there is much more ground of fear than hope concerning them; nay, perhaps, while we are pressing the dying sinner to repentance, and he is bungling about it, he expires, in great doubt and perplexity of mind, what will become of him! or, if his eyes be closed with more comfortable hopes of his condition, the next time he opens them again he may find his fearful mistake, like the rich man in the parable, who, when he was in hell, "lifted up his eyes, being in torment!"

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This is a very dismal and melancholy consideration, and commands all men presently to repent, and not to put off the main work of their lives to the end of them, and the time of sickness and old age. Let us not offer up a carcass to God instead of a living and acceptable sacrifice: but let us turn to God in the days of our health and strength, "before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, of which we shall say we have no pleasure in them; before the sun, and the moon, and the stars be darkened," as Solomon elegantly expresseth it, (Eccles. xii. 1, 2.) before all the comforts of life be gone, before our faculties be all ceased and spent, before our understandings be too weak, and our wills too strong; our understandings be too weak for consideration and the deliberate exercise of repentance, and our wills too strong and stiff to be bent and bowed to it.

Let us not deceive ourselves; heaven is not a hospital made to receive all sick and aged persons that can but put up a faint request to be admitted there; no, no, they are never like to "see the kingdom of God," who, instead of "seeking it in the first place," make it their "last refuge and retreat;" and when they find the sentence of death upon them, only to avoid present execution, do bethink themselves of getting to heaven, and, since there is no other remedy, are contented to petition the great King and Judge of the world, that they may be transported thither.

Upon all these considerations, let us use no delay in a matter of such mighty consequence to our eternal happiness, but let the counsel which was given to Nebuchadnezzar be acceptable to us; let us "break off our sins by righteousness, and our

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iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if so be it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity." Repentance and alms do well together; let us "break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor;" especially upon this great occasion, which his Majesty's great goodness to those distressed strangers, that have taken sanctuary among us, hath lately presented us withal, "remembering that we also are in the body," and liable to the like sufferings; and considering, on the one hand, that gracious promise of our Lord, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy;" and, on the other hand, that terrible threatening in St. James, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy."

To conclude, from all that hath been said, let us take up a present resolution of a better course, and enter immediately upon it, "to-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!—And grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we may all know and do, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, for thy mercy's sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen."

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# SERMON CLXII.

## THE SHAMEFULNESS OF SIN, AN ARGUMENT FOR REPENTANCE.

*What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*—ROM. vi. 21, 22.

THERE are two passions which do always, in some degree or other, accompany a true repentance; viz. sorrow and shame for our sins; because these are necessary to engage men to a resolution of making that change wherein repentance does consist: for till we are heartily sorry for what we have done, and ashamed of the evil of it, it is not likely that we should ever come to a firm and steady purpose of forsaking our evil ways, and betaking ourselves to a better course.

And these two passions, of sorrow and shame for our sins, were wont anciently to be signified by those outward expressions of humiliation and repentance, which we find so frequently mentioned in Scripture, of being clothed in sackcloth, as a testimony of our sorrow and mourning for our sins, and of "being sprinkled upon the head, and covered over with filth and dirt, and dust and ashes," in token of our shame and confusion of face for all our iniquities and transgressions. Hence are those ex-

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pressions in Scripture of repenting in sackcloth and ashes, of lying down in our shame, and being covered with confusion, in token of their great sorrow and shame for the manifold and heinous sins which they have been guilty of.

Of the former of these, viz. trouble and sorrow for our sins, I have very lately treated;* and of the latter, I intend now, by God's assistance, to speak, viz. shame for our sins, and that from these words which I have recited to you: "What fruit had ye then in those things?" &c. In which words the apostle makes a comparison between a holy and virtuous, and a sinful and vicious, course of life, and sets before us a perfect enumeration of the manifest inconveniences of the one, and the manifold advantages of the other.

First, The manifest inconveniences of a vicious and sinful course; and the apostle mentions these three:

I. It is unprofitable, it brings no manner of present benefit and advantage to us, if all things be rightly calculated and considered. "What fruit had ye then in those things?" "Then," (*i. e.*) at the time when you committed those sins, had you any present advantage by them? No, certainly; but quite contrary.

II. The reflection upon our sins afterwards is cause of shame and confusion to us; "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?"

III. The final issue and consequence of these things is very dismal and miserable; "The end of those things is death." Let us put these things to-

* See Sermon CLX. p. 281.

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gether, and see what they amount to.—No fruit then when ye did these things, and shame now when ye come afterwards to reflect upon them, and death and misery at the last.

Secondly, Here is likewise, on the other hand, represented to us the manifold benefits of a holy and virtuous life. And that upon these two accounts:

I. Of the present benefit of it, which the apostle calls here fruit: "Ye have your fruit unto holiness."

II. In respect of the future reward of it: "And the end everlasting life." Here is a considerable earnest in hand, and a mighty recompence afterwards, infinitely beyond the proportion of our best actions and services, both in respect of the greatness and the duration of it, "everlasting life;" for a few transient and very imperfect actions of obedience, a perfect, and immutable, and endless state of happiness. I shall begin with the

First of the two general heads; viz. The manifest inconveniences of a sinful and vicious course; and the apostle, I told you in the text, takes notice of three;

I. It is unprofitable, and if all things be rightly calculated and considered, it brings no manner of present advantage and benefit to us. "What fruit had ye then in those things?" "Then," (*i. e.*) when ye committed those sins, had you any present advantage by them? No, certainly, quite the contrary; as if the apostle had said, If you seriously reflect upon your former course of impiety and sin, wherein you have continued so long, you cannot but acknowledge that it brought no manner of advantage to you; and when all accounts are truly cast up, you must, if you will confess the truth, own, that you were in no sort gainers by it: for the words are a

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μεθυσις, and the apostle plainly intends more than he expresseth, "What fruit had ye then in those things?" (*i. e.*) The wicked course which ye formerly lived in was so far from being any ways beneficial to you, that it was, on the contrary, upon all accounts extremely to your prejudice and disadvantage.

And this is not only true in respect of the final issue and consequence of a sinful and vicious course of life, that no man is a gainer by it at the long run; and if we take into our consideration another world, and the dreadful and endless misery which a wicked and impenitent life will then plunge men into (which, in the farther handling of this text, will at large be spoken to, being the last of the three particulars under this first general head); but it is true likewise, even in respect of this world, and with regard only to this present and temporal life, without looking so far as the future recompence and punishment of sin in another world.

And this would plainly appear, by an induction of these three particulars:

1. It is evident that some sins are plainly mischievous to the temporal interest of men, as tending, either to the disturbance of their minds, or the endangering of their health and lives, or to the prejudice of their estates, or the blasting of them in their reputation and good name.

2. That there are other sins, which, though they are not so visibly burdened and attended with mischievous consequences, yet they are plainly unprofitable, and bring no manner of real advantage to men, either in respect of gain or pleasure; such are the sins of profaneness and customary swearing in common conversation.

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3. That even those sins and vices which make the fairest pretence to be of advantage to us, when all accounts are cast up, and all circumstances duly weighed and considered, will be found to be but pretenders, and in no degree able to perform and make good what they so largely promise beforehand, when they tempt us to the commission of them. There are some vices which pretend to bring in great profit, and tempt worldly-minded men, whose minds are disposed to catch at that bait; such are the sins of covetousness and oppression, of fraud, and falsehood, and perfidiousness. And there are others which pretend to bring pleasure along with them, which is almost an irresistible temptation to voluptuous and sensual men; such are the sins of revenge, and intemperance, and lust. But, upon a particular examination of each of these, it will evidently appear, that there is no such profit or pleasure in any of these vices as can be a reasonable temptation to any man to fall in love with them, and to engage in the commission and practice of them. But I shall not now enlarge upon any of these, having lately discoursed upon them from another text. I shall therefore proceed to the

II. Second inconvenience which I mentioned of a sinful and vicious course; viz. that the reflection upon our sins afterwards, is cause of great shame and confusion to us. "What fruit had you then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?" And this is a very proper argument for this season;* because the passion of shame, as it is a natural and useful consequent of sin, so it is a disposition necessarily required to a true repentance.

* Preached in Lent.

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Most men when they commit a known fault are apt to be ashamed, and ready to blush whenever they are put in mind of it, and charged with it. Some persons, indeed, have gone so far in sin, and have waded so deep in a vicious course, as to be confirmed and hardened in their wickedness to that degree, as to be past all shame, and almost all sense of their faults; especially in regard of the more common and ordinary vices, which are in vogue and fashion; and in the commission whereof they are countenanced and encouraged by company and example. Such were those of whom the prophet speaks, (Jer. vi. 15.) "Were they ashamed, when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush."

But yet even these persons, when they come to be sensible of their guilt, so as to be brought to repentance, they cannot then but be ashamed of what they have done. For what face soever men may set upon their vices, sin is shameful in itself, and so apt to fill men with confusion of face, when they seriously reflect upon it, that they cannot harden their foreheads against all sense of shame. And whatever men may declare to the contrary, this is tacitly acknowledged by the generality of men, in that they are so solicitous and careful to conceal their faults from the eyes of others, and to keep them as secret as they can; and whenever they are discovered and laid open, it is matter of great trouble and confusion to them, and if any one happen to upbraid and twit them with their miscarriages of any kind, they cannot bear with patience to hear of them.

There are, indeed, some few such prodigies and monsters of men, as are able, after great strugglings

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with their consciences, to force themselves to boast impudently of their wickedness, and "to glory in their shame;" not because they do really and inwardly believe their vices to be a honour and glory to them; but because, conscious to themselves that they have done shameful things, and believing that others know it, they put on a whore's forehead, and think to prevent the upbraiding of others, by owning what they have done, and seeming to glory in it: but yet for all that, these persons, if they would confess the truth, do feel some confusion in themselves, and they are inwardly sensible of the infamy and reproach of such actions, for all they would seem to the world to bear it out so well: for when all is done, there is a wide difference between the impudence of a criminal, and the confidence and assurance of a clear conscience, that is fully satisfied of its own innocence and integrity. The conscientious man is not ashamed of any thing that he hath done: but the impudent sinner only seems not to be so, but all the while feels a great deal of confusion in his own mind. The one is sensible and satisfied that there is no cause for shame; the other is conscious to himself that there is cause, but he offers violence to himself, and suppresses all he can the sense and show of it, and will needs face down the world, that he hath no guilt and regret in his own mind for any thing that he hath done.

Now that sin is truly matter of shame, will be very evident, if we consider these two things:

First, If we consider the nature of this passion of shame.

Secondly, If we consider what there is in sin which gives real ground and occasion for it.

First, For the nature of this passion. Shame is

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the trouble or confusion of mind, occasioned by something that tends to our disgrace and dishonour, to our infamy and reproach. Now there is nothing truly and really matter of shame and reproach to us, but what we ourselves have done, or have been some way or other accessary to the doing of, by our own fault or neglect, and by consequence what it was in our power and choice not to have done: for no man is ashamed of what he is sure he could not help. Necessity, unless it be wilful and contracted, and happens through some precedent occasion and fault of our own, does take away all just cause of shame.

And nothing likewise is matter of shame, but something which we ought not to do, which misbecomes us, and is below the dignity and perfection of our nature, and is against some duty and obligation that is upon us to the contrary; and, consequently, is a reproach to our reason and understanding, a reflection upon our prudence and discretion, and at first sight hath an appearance of ruggedness and deformity.

And all actions of this nature do receive several aggravations with respect to the persons against whom, and in whose presence, and under whose eye and knowledge, these shameful things are done. Now I shall shew, in the

Second place, that sin contains in it whatsoever is justly accounted infamous, together with all the aggravations of shame and reproach that can be imagined. And this will appear by considering sin and vice in these two respects:

I. In relation to ourselves.

II. In respect to God, against whom, and in whose sight, it is committed.

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I. In relation to ourselves, there are these four things which make sin and vice to be very shameful:

1. The natural ruggedness and deformity of it.

2. That it is so great a dishonour to our nature, and to the dignity and excellency of our being.

3. That it is so great a reproach to our reason and understanding, and so foul a reflection upon our prudence and discretion.

4. That it is our own voluntary act and choice.

Every one of these considerations render it very shameful, and all of them together ought to fill the sinner with confusion of face. I shall speak to them severally.

1. The natural ruggedness and deformity of sin and vice render it very shameful. Men are apt to be ashamed of any thing in them, or belonging to them, that looks ugly and monstrous, and therefore they endeavour with great care and art to conceal and dissemble their deformity in any kind. How strangely do we see men concerned, with all their diligence and skill, to cover and palliate any defect or deformity in their bodies; an ill face, if they could; however, a foul and bad complexion, or a blind squinting eye, a crooked body, or limb, or whatever is ill-favoured or monstrous. Now, in regard of our souls and better part, sin hath all the monstrousness and deformity in it which we can imagine in the body, and much more: and it is as hard to be covered from the eye of discerning men, as the deformity of the body is; but impossible to be concealed from the eye of God, to whom darkness and light, secret and open, are all one. But then the moral defects and deformities of the mind have this advantage above the natural defects and

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deformities of the body, that the former are possible to be cured by the grace of God, in conjunction with our own care and endeavour; whereas no diligence or skill can ever help or remove many of the natural defects and deformities of the body.

Sin is the blindness of our minds, the perverseness and crookedness of our wills, and the monstrous irregularity and disorder of our affections and appetites; it is the misplacing of our powers and faculties, the setting of our wills and passions above our reason; all which is ugly and unnatural; and if we were truly sensible of it, matter of great shame and reproach to us.

There is hardly any vice but at first sight hath an odious and ugly appearance to a well-disciplined and innocent mind, that hath never had any acquaintance with it. And however familiarity and custom may abate the sense of its deformity, yet it is as it was before, and the change that is made in us does not alter the nature of the thing. Drunkenness and furious passion, pride and falsehood, covetousness and cruelty, are odious, and matter of shame, in the sincere and uncorrupted opinion of all mankind. And though a man, by the frequent practice of any of these vices, and a long familiarity with them, may not be so sensible of the deformity of them in himself, yet he quickly discerns the ugliness of them in others, whenever they come in his way, and could with salt and sharpness enough upbraid those whom he sees guilty of them, but that he is inwardly conscious, that the reproach may be so easily returned and thrown back upon himself. However, this is a natural acknowledgment of the deformity and shamefulness of sin and vice.



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2. They are likewise shameful, because they are so great a dishonour to our nature, and to the dignity and excellency of our being. We go below ourselves, and act beneath the dignity of our nature, when we do any thing contrary to the rules and laws of it, or to the revealed will of God; because these are the bounds and limits which God and nature hath set to human actions; and are the measures of our duty; *i. e.* what is fit and becoming for us to do, and what not. So that all sin and vice is base and unworthy, and beneath the dignity of our nature; it argues a corrupt and diseased constitution and habit of mind, a crooked and perverse disposition of will, and a sordid and mean temper of spirit.

And therefore the Scripture doth frequently represent a state of sin and wickedness, by that which is accounted the basest and meanest condition among men, by a state of servitude and slavery, especially if it had been our choice, or the evident and necessary consequence of our wilful fault: for we do as bad as choose it, when we wilfully bring it upon ourselves. So that to be a sinner, is to be a slave to some vile lust, appetite, or passion, to some unnatural or irregular desire; it is to sell ourselves into bondage, and to part with one of the most valuable things in the world, our liberty, upon low and unworthy terms. Such a state and condition does unavoidably debase and debauch our minds, and break the force and firmness of our spirits, and robs us, as Delilah did Sampson, of our strength and courage, of our resolution and constancy; so that men have not the heart left to design and endeavour in good earnest their own rescue out of this mean and miserable estate, into which, by their own folly and fault, they have brought themselves.

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When men are engaged into a custom of sinning, and have habituated themselves to any vicious course, how do they betray their weakness, and want of resolution, by being at the beck of every foolish lust, and by suffering themselves to be commanded and hurried away by every unruly appetite and passion, to do things which they know to be greatly to their harm and prejudice, and which they are convinced are mean and sordid things, and such as they are ashamed that any wise man should see them doing! And there is no greater argument of a pitiful and degenerate spirit, than to commit such things as a man would blush to be surprised in, and would be mightily troubled to hear of afterwards. And, which is more, after he hath been convinced by manifold experience, that they are a shame and disgrace to him, and make him hang down his head, and let fall his countenance, whenever he is in better company than himself; yet after this to go and do the same things again, which he is sensible are so shameful, and to be so impotent, and to have so little command of himself, as not to be able to free himself from this bondage, nor the heart to pray to God that by his grace he would enable him hereto.

And that sin is of this shameful nature is evident, in that the greatest part of sinners take so much care and pains to hide their vices from the sight and notice of men, and to this purpose choose darkness and secret places of retirement to commit their sins in. The apostle takes notice, that thus much modesty was left, even in a very wicked and degenerate age: (1 Thess. v. 7.) "They that be drunk (says he) are drunk in the night." Now all this is a plain acknowledgment, that sin is a spurious and degenerate thing, that it misbecomes human nature, and is be-



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low the dignity of a reasonable creature: otherwise, why should men be so solicitous and concerned to cover their faults from the sight of others? if they are not ashamed of them, why do they not bring them into the broad light, and shew them openly, if they think they will endure it?

So true is that observation which Plato makes—That though a man were sure that God would forgive his sins, and that men should never know them, yet there is that baseness in sin, that a wise man, that considers what it is, would blush to himself alone to be guilty of it; and though he were not afraid of the punishment, would be ashamed of the turpitude and deformity of it.

Did but a man consider seriously with himself, how mean and unmanly it is for a man to be drunk; and what an apish and ridiculous thing he renders himself to all sober men that behold him, and with what contempt and scorn they entertain such a sight; and how brutish it is to wallow in any unlawful lust, and how much a man descends and stoops beneath himself: what shameful fear and cowardice he betrays when he is frighted to tell a lie out of fear, or tempted thereto for some little advantage; and yet is so inconsistent with himself, as to have, or to pretend to have, the courage to fight any man that shall tell him so saucy a truth, as that he told a lie.

Would but a man think beforehand, how unworthy and how unequal a thing it is to defraud or cheat his brother, or to do any thing to another man which he would be loath, in the like case, that he should do to him; how base a thing it is for a man to be perfidious and false to his promise or trust; how monstrous to be unthankful to one that hath

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highly obliged him, and every way and upon all occasions deserved well at his hands; and so I might instance in all other sorts of sins: I say, he that considers this well and wisely, though there were no law against sin, and (if it were a possible case, and fit to be supposed) though there were no such being as God in the world, to call him to account and punish him for it, yet, out of mere generosity and greatness of mind, out of pure respect to himself, and the dignity and rank of his being, and of his order in the world, out of very reverence to human nature, and the inward persuasion of his own mind (however he came by that persuasion) concerning the indecency, and deformity, and shamefulness of the thing; I say, for these reasons, if there were no other, a man would strive with himself, with all his might, to refrain from sin and vice, and not only blush, but abhor to think of doing a wicked action.

3. Sin will yet farther appear shameful, in that it is so great a reproach to our understandings and reasons, and so foul a blot upon our prudence and discretion. *Omnis peccans aut ignorans est, aut incogitans*, is a saying, I think, of one of the schoolmen (as one would guess by the Latin of it); "Every sinner is either an ignorant or an inconsiderate person." Either men do not understand what they do, when they commit sin; or if they do know, they do not actually attend to and consider what they know. Either they are habitually or actually ignorant of what they do; for sin and consideration cannot dwell together; it is so very unreasonable and absurd a thing, that it requires either gross ignorance, or stupid inadvertency, to make a man capable of committing it. Whenever a man sins, he must

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either be destitute of reason, or must lay it aside or asleep for the time, and so suffer himself to be hurried away, and to act brutishly, as if he had no understanding.

Did but men attentively consider what it is to offend God, and to break the laws of that great Lawgiver, who "is able to save or to destroy," they would discern so many invincible objections against the thing, and would be filled with such strong fears and jealousies of the fatal issue and event of it, that they would not dare to venture upon it. And therefore we find the Scripture so frequently resolving the wickedness of men into their ignorance and inconsiderateness. (Psal. xiv. 4.) "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" Intimating that by their actions one would judge so. And the same account God himself also gives elsewhere of the frequent disobedience and rebellion of the people of Israel: (Deut. xxxii. 28, 29.) "They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" Knowledge and consideration would cure a great part of the wickedness that is in the world; men would not commit sin with so much greediness would they but take time to consider and bethink themselves what they do.

Have we not reason then to be ashamed of sin, which casts such a reproach of ignorance and rashness upon us? and of imprudence, likewise, and indiscretion? since nothing can be more directly and plainly against our greatest and best interest, both of body and soul, both here and hereafter, both now and to all eternity. And there is nothing that men are more ashamed of, than to be guilty of so great

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an imprudence, as to act clearly against their own interest, to which sin is the most plainly cross and contrary that it is possible for any thing to be. No man can engage and continue in a sinful course, without being so far abused and infatuated, as to be contented to part with everlasting happiness, and to be undone and miserable for ever; none but he that can persuade himself against all the reason and sense of mankind, that there is pleasure enough in the transient acts of sin to make amends for eternal sorrow, and shame, and suffering. And can such a thought as this enter into the heart of a considerate man? Epicurus was so wise, as to conclude against all pleasures that would give a man more trouble and disturbance afterwards; against all pleasures that had pain and grief consequent upon them; and he forbids his wise man to taste of them, or to meddle with them; and had he believed any thing of a future state, he must, according to his principle, have pronounced it the greatest folly that could be, for any man to purchase the pleasures and happiness of a few years, at the dear rate of eternal misery and torment. So that, if it be a disgrace to a man to act imprudently, and to do things plainly against his interest, then vice is the greatest reproach that is possible.

The 4th and last consideration, which renders sin so shameful to us, is, that it is our own voluntary act and choice. We choose this disgrace, and willingly bring this reproach upon ourselves. We pity an idiot, and one that is naturally destitute of understanding, or one that loseth the use of his reason by a disease or other inevitable accident: but every one despiseth him who besots himself, and plays the fool out of carelessness and a gross neglect of himself.

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And this is the case of a sinner; there is no man that sinneth, but because he is wanting to himself; he might be wiser and do better, and will not; but he chooses his own devices, and voluntarily runs himself upon those inconveniencies, which it was in his power to have avoided.

Not but that I do heartily own and lament the great corruption and degeneracy of our nature, and the strong propensions which appear so early in us to that which is evil; but God hath provided a remedy and cure for all this: for since "the grace of God which brings salvation unto all men hath appeared," under the influence and through the assistance of that grace which is offered to them by the gospel, men may "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." For I make no doubt, but since God has entered into a new covenant of grace with mankind, and offered new terms of life and salvation to us; I say, I doubt not but his grace is ready at hand, to enable us to perform all those conditions which he requires of us, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

There was a way of salvation established, before the gospel was clearly revealed to the world; and they who, under that dispensation, whether Jews or gentiles, sincerely endeavoured to do the will of God, so far as they knew it, were not utterly destitute of Divine grace and assistance: but now there is a more plentiful effusion of God's grace and Holy Spirit; so that whoever under the gospel sins deliberately, sins wilfully, and is wicked, not for want of power but of will to do otherwise. And this is that which makes sin so shameful a thing, and so very reproachful to us, that we destroy our-

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selves by our own folly and neglect of ourselves, and become miserable by our own choice, and when the grace of God hath put it in our power to be wise and to be happy.

I should now have proceeded to the second thing I proposed, which was to consider sin in relation to God, and to shew that it is no less shameful in that respect, than I have shewn it to be with regard to ourselves; but this I shall refer to another opportunity.

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# SERMON CLXIII.

## THE SHAMEFULNESS OF SIN, AN ARGUMENT FOR REPENTANCE.

*What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*—ROM. vi. 21, 22.

IN these words the apostle makes a comparison between a holy and virtuous, and a sinful and vicious course of life, and sets before us a perfect enumeration of the manifest inconveniencies of the one, and the manifold advantages of the other.

I began with the first of these; viz. to shew the manifest inconveniencies of a sinful and vicious course. I am upon the second inconvenience of a sinful course; viz. That the reflection upon it afterwards is cause of great shame and confusion of face to us; and that

First, In relation to ourselves. Which I have dispatched, and proceed now, in the

Second place, to consider sin in respect of God, against whom, and in whose sight and presence, it is committed; and upon examination it will appear to be no less shameful in this respect than the other.

There are some persons before whom we are more apt to be ashamed and blush, than before others; as those, whom we reverence, those to whom we are greatly obliged, and those who are clear of those

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faults which we are guilty of; and, those who hate or greatly dislike what we do, especially if they be present with us, and in our company, if they stand by us, and observe, and take notice of what we do, and are likely to publish our folly and make it known, and have authority and power to punish us for our faults; we are ashamed to have done any thing that is vile and unworthy before such persons. Now to render sin the more shameful, God may be considered by us under all these notions, and in all these respects.

I. Whenever we commit any sin, we do it before him, in his presence, and under his eye and knowledge, to whom of all persons in the world we ought to pay the most profound reverence. I remember Seneca somewhere says, that "There are some persons, *quorum interventu perditi quoque homines vitia supprimerent*, that are so awful and so generally reverenced for the eminency of their virtues, that even the most profligate and impudent sinners will endeavour to suppress their vices, and refrain from any thing that is notoriously bad and uncomely, whilst such persons stand by them, and are in presence." Such an one was Cato among the Romans. The people of Rome had such a regard and reverence for him, that if he appeared, they would not begin or continue their usual sports, until he was withdrawn from the theatre, thinking them too light to be acted before a person of his gravity and virtue: and if they were so much awed by the presence of a wise and a virtuous man, that they were ashamed to do any thing that was unseemly before him; how much more should the presence of the holy God, who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," make us blush to do any thing that is lewd and vile in his sight, and fill us with shame and confusion of face

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at the thoughts of it? Now whenever we commit any sin, God looks upon us; and he alone is an ample theatre indeed. That he observes what we do, ought to be more to us, than if the eyes of all the world besides were gazing upon us.

2. He likewise is incomparably our greatest benefactor; and there is no person in the world to whom, in any degree, we stand so much obliged, as to him; and from whom we can expect and hope for so much good, as from him; the consideration whereof must make us ashamed, so often as we consider, and are conscious to ourselves, that we have done any thing that is grievous and displeasing to him.

We are wont to have a more peculiar reverence for those to whom we are exceedingly beholden, and to be much ashamed to do any thing before them which may signify disrespect, and much more enmity against them; because this would be horrible ingratitude, one of the most odious and shameful of all vices. And is there any one to whom we can stand more obliged, than to him that made us, than to the author and founder of our beings, and the great patron and preserver of our lives? and can there then be any before whom, and against whom, we should be more ashamed to offend? When the prodigal in the parable would set forth the shamefulness of his miscarriage, he aggravates it from hence, that he had offended against and before one to whom he had been so infinitely obliged: "Father (says he), I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight."

3. We are ashamed likewise to be guilty of any fault or crime before those persons who are clear of it, or of any thing of the like nature, themselves. Men are not apt to be ashamed before those who are their

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fellow-criminals, and involved with them in the same guilt, because they do not stand in awe of them, nor can have any reverence for them. Those who are equally guilty, must bear with one another. We are not apt to fear the censures and reproofs of those who are as bad as ourselves; but we are ashamed to do a foul and unworthy action before those who are innocent and free from the same, or the like sins and vices which we are guilty of.

Now, whenever we commit any sin it is in the presence of the Holy Ghost, who hath no part with us in our crimes, whose nature is removed at the farthest distance from sin, and is as contrary to it as can be. "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God." And therefore, of all persons in the world, we should blush to be guilty of it before him.

4. We are apt also to be ashamed to do any thing before those who dislike and detest what we do. To do a wicked action before those who are not offended at it, or perhaps take pleasure in it, is no such matter of shame to us. Now, of all others, God is the greatest hater of sin, and the most perfect enemy to it in the whole world. (Hab. i. 3.) "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity;" *i. e.* with patience, and without an infinite hatred and abhorrence of it. Such is the unspotted purity and perfection of the Divine nature, that it is not possible that God should give the least countenance to any thing that is evil. (Psal. v. 4, 5.) "Thou art not a God (says David there to him,) that hast pleasure in iniquity, neither shall evil dwell with thee: the wicked shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

5. We are ashamed likewise to do any thing that is evil and unseemly before those who we are afraid

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will publish our faults to others, and will make known and expose the folly of them. Now whenever we sin, it is before him who will most certainly one day bring all our works of darkness into the open light, and expose all our secret deeds of dishonesty upon the public stage of the world, and make all the vilest of our actions known, and lay them open, with all the shameful circumstances of them, before men and angels, to our everlasting shame and confusion. This is the meaning of that proverbial speech, so often used by our Saviour, "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be made manifest." All the sins which we now commit with so much caution, in secret and dark retirements, shall in that great day of revelation when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, be set in open view, and in so full and strong a light, that all the world shall see them, and that which was plotted and contrived in so much secrecy, and hardly whispered in this world, shall then be proclaimed aloud, and as it were upon the house-tops.

6. And lastly, We are ashamed and afraid to commit a fault before those who we believe will call us to an account for it, and punish us severely. A man may suffer innocently, and for a good cause; but all suffering, in that case, is by wise and good men esteemed honourable and glorious, and though we are condemned by men, we are acquitted in our own consciences: but that which is properly called punishment is always attended with infamy and reproach; because it always supposeth some fault and crime, as the ground and reason of it. Hence it is that in this world men are not only afraid, but ashamed, to commit any fault before those who they think have authority and power to punish it. He is

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an impudent villain, indeed, that will venture to cut a purse in the presence of the judge.

Now whenever we commit any wickedness, we do it under the eye of the great Judge of the world, who steadfastly beholds us, and whose omnipotent justice stands by us ready armed and charged for our destruction, and can in a moment cut us off. Every sin that we are guilty of, in thought, word, or deed, is all in the presence of the holy, and just, and powerful God; whose power enables him, and whose holiness and justice will effectually engage him, one time or other, if a timely repentance doth not prevent it, to inflict a terrible punishment upon all the workers of iniquity.

You see then by all that hath been said upon this argument, how shameful a thing sin is, and what confusion of face the reflection upon our wicked lives ought to cause in all of us. "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?" If ever we are brought to a true repentance for our sins, it cannot but be matter of great shame to us.

We find, in Scripture, that shame doth continually accompany repentance, and is inseparable from it. This is one mark and character of a true penitent, that he is ashamed of what he hath done. Thus Ezra, when he makes confession of the sins of the people, he testifies and declares his shame for what they had done; "I said, O my God! I am ashamed, and blush to lift up mine eyes to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespasses are grown up to the heavens." (Ezra ix. 6.) And may not we of this nation at this day take these words unto ourselves, considering to what a strange height our sins are grown, and how iniquity abounds among us? So likewise the prophet Jeremiah, when

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he would express the repentance of the people of Israel. (Jer. iii. 25.) "We lie down (says he) in our shame, and our confusion covereth us, because we have sinned against the Lord our God." In like manner the prophet Daniel, after he had in the name of the people made a humble acknowledgment of their manifold and great sins, he takes shame to himself and them for them: (Dan. ix. 5, &c.) "We have sinned (says he), and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled in departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments. O Lord, righteousness belongeth to thee; but unto us confusion of face, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass which they have trespassed against thee: O Lord! to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee." By which we may judge, how considerable and essential a part of repentance this holy man esteemed shame, for the sins they had been guilty of, to be. And, indeed, upon all occasions of solemn repentance and humiliation for sin, this taking shame for their sins is hardly ever omitted, as if there could be no sincere confession of sin and repentance for it, without testifying their shame and confusion of face upon the remembrance of their sins.

Now to stir up this affection of shame in us, let me offer to you these three considerations:

I. Consider what great reason we have to be heartily ashamed of all the sins and offences which we have been guilty of against God. It was a good old precept of philosophy, "that we should rever-

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ence ourselves;" *i. e.* that we should never do any thing that should be matter of shame and reproach to us afterwards, nothing that misbecomes us, and is unworthy of us.

I have shewn, at large, that all sin and vice is a dishonour to our nature, and beneath the dignity of it; that it is a great reproach to our reason, and directly contrary to our true and best interest; that it hath all the aggravating circumstances of infamy and shame; that every sin that was at any time committed by us, was done in the presence of one, whom of all persons in the world we have most reason to reverence, and against him, to whom of all others we stand most obliged for the greatest favours, for innumerable benefits, for infinite mercy, and patience, and forbearance towards us, in the presence of the holy and just God, who is at the farthest distance from sin, and the greatest and most implacable enemy to it in the whole world; and who will one day punish all our faults, and expose us to open shame for them; who will "bring every work into judgment, and every secret sin" that ever we committed, and take vengeance upon us for all our iniquities. So that whenever we sin we shamefully entreat ourselves, and give the deepest wounds to our reputation in the esteem of him, who is the most competent judge of what is truly honourable and praiseworthy, and clothe ourselves with shame and dishonour.

We are ashamed of poverty, because the poor man is despised, and almost ridiculous in the eye of the proud and covetous rich man, "whose riches are his high tower," and make him apt to look down upon the poor man that is below him with contempt and scorn; we are ashamed of a dangerous and conta-



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gious disease, because all men fly infectious company; but a man may be poor or sick by misfortune; but no man is wicked, but by his own fault and wilful choice. Ill-natured and inconsiderate men will be apt to contemn us for our poverty and affliction in any kind, but by our vices we render ourselves odious to God, and to all good and considerate men.

II. Consider that shame for sin now, is the way to prevent eternal shame and confusion hereafter. For this is one great part of the misery of another world, that the sinner shall then be filled with everlasting shame and confusion at the remembrance of his faults and folly. The eternal misery of wicked men is sometimes in Scripture represented, as if it consisted only, or chiefly, in the infamy and reproach which will then overwhelm them, when all their crimes and faults shall be exposed and laid open to the view of the whole world: (Dan. xii. 2.) where the general resurrection of the just and unjust is thus described: "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame and contempt;" where "everlasting life" and "everlasting shame" are opposed, as if eternal shame were a kind of perpetual death.

In this world sinners make a hard shift, by concealing or extenuating their faults, as well as they can, to suppress or lessen their shame; they have not now so clear and full a conviction of the evil and folly of their sin: God is pleased to bear with them, and to spare them at present, and they do not yet feel the dismal effects and consequences of a wicked life: but in the next world, when "the righteous judgment of God is revealed," and the full vials

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of his wrath shall be poured forth upon sinners, they shall then "be clothed with shame as with a garment, and be covered with confusion;" then they will feel the folly of their sins, and have a sensible demonstration within themselves of the infinite evil of them; their own consciences will then furiously fly in their faces, and with the greatest bitterness and rage upbraid and reproach them with the folly of their own doings; and so long as we are sensible that we suffer for our own folly, so long we must unavoidably be ashamed of what we have done. So that if sinners shall be everlastingly tormented in another world, it necessarily follows, that they shall be eternally confounded.

Is it not then better to remember our ways now, and to be ashamed and repent of them, than to bring everlasting shame and confusion upon ourselves, before God, and angels, and men? This is the argument which St. John useth, to take men off from sin, and to engage them to holiness and righteousness of life; (1 John ii. 28.) "That when he shall appear," that is, when he shall come to judge the world, "we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

III. And lastly, Consider that nothing sets men at a farther distance from repentance, and all hopes of their becoming better, and brings them nearer to ruin, than impudence in a sinful course. There are too many in the world who are so far from being ashamed of their wickedness, and blushing at the mention of their faults, that they boast of them, and glory in them. God often complains of this in the people of Israel, as a sad presage of their ruin, and an ill sign of their desperate and irrecoverable condition: (Jer. iii. 3.) "Thou hadst a whore's fore-



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head, and refusedst to be ashamed;" and (Jer. vi. 15.) "Were they ashamed when they committed abominations? Nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall, and in the time that I visit them they shall be cast down." Hear, likewise, how the apostle doth lament the case of such persons, as incurable, and past all remedy: (Philip. iii. 18, 19.) "There are many of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame." Such persons who glory in that which ought to be their shame, what can their end be but destruction?

There is certainly no greater argument of a degenerate person, and of one that is utterly lost to all sense of goodness, than to be void of shame: and as, on the one hand, they must be very towardly, and well-disposed to virtue, who are drawn by ingenuity, and mere sense of obligation and kindness: so, on the other hand, they must be very stupid and insensible, who are not wrought upon by arguments of fear and sense of shame. There is hardly any hopes of that man who is not to be reclaimed from an evil course, neither by the apprehension of danger, nor of disgrace, and who can at once securely neglect both his safety and reputation.

Hear how the prophet represents the deplorable case of such persons: (Isa. iii. 9.) "The show of their countenance bears witness against them;" in the Hebrew it is, "The hardness of their countenance doth testify against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their souls, for they have rewarded evil to them-

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selves." When men are once arrived to that pitch of impiety, as to harden their foreheads against all sense and show of shame, and so as to be able to set a good face upon the foulest matter in the world, "Woe unto them," because their case seems then to be desperate, and past all hopes of recovery. For who can hope that a man will forsake his sins, when he is not so much as ashamed of them? But yet one would think, that those who are not ashamed of their impiety, should be ashamed of their impudence, and should at least blush at this, that they can do the vilest and the most shameful things in the world without blushing.

To conclude this whole discourse, let the consideration of the evil and shamefulness of sin have this double effect upon us, to make us heartily ashamed of the past errors and miscarriages of our lives, and firmly resolved to do better for the future.

I. To be heartily ashamed of the past errors of our lives. So often as we reflect upon the manifold and heinous provocations of the Divine Majesty, which many of us have been guilty of in the long course of a wicked life, together with the heavy aggravations of our sins, by all the circumstances that can render them abominable and shameful, not only in the eye of God and men, but of our own consciences likewise; we have great reason to humble ourselves before God, in a penitent acknowledgment of them, and every one of us to say with Job, "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;" and with Ezra, "O my God! I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespass is grown up unto

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the heavens: and now, O my God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments;" and with holy Daniel, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly; O Lord! righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face." Thus we should reproach and upbraid ourselves in the presence of that holy God, whom we have so often and so highly offended, and against whom we have done as evil things as we could, and say with the prodigal son in the parable: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

If we would thus take shame to ourselves, and humble ourselves before God, he would "be merciful to us miserable sinners;" he would "take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously;" and so soon as ever he saw us coming towards him, would meet us with joy, and embrace us in the arms of his mercy. And then,

II. As we should be heartily ashamed of the past errors and miscarriages of our lives, so we should firmly resolve, by God's grace, to do better for the future; never to consent to iniquity, or to do any thing which we are convinced is contrary to our duty, and which will be matter of shame to us, when we come to look back upon it, and make our blood to rise in our faces at the mention or intimation of it; which will make us to sneak, and hang down our heads, when we are twitted and upbraided with it, and which, if it be not prevented by a timely humiliation and repentance, will fill us with horror and amazement, with shame and confusion of face, both at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

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So that when we look into our lives, and examine the actions of them, when we consider what we have done, and what our doings have deserved, we should, in a due sense of the great and manifold miscarriages of our lives, and from a deep sorrow, and shame, and detestation of ourselves for them; I say, we should, with that true penitent described in Job, take words to ourselves, and say, "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more; that which I know not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." And thus I have done with the second inconvenience of a sinful and vicious course of life; viz. that the reflection upon it afterwards causeth shame; "What fruit had you then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?"

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# SERMON CLXIV.

## THE FINAL ISSUE OF SIN, AN ARGUMENT FOR REPENTANCE.

*What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*—ROM. vi. 21, 22.

THESE words are a comparison between a holy and virtuous, and a sinful and vicious course of life, and set before us the manifest inconveniencies of the one, and the manifold advantages of the other. I have entered into a discourse upon the first of these heads; viz. the manifest inconveniencies of a sinful and vicious course: and the text mentions these three:

I. That it is unprofitable.

II. That the reflection upon it afterwards is matter of shame. These two I have spoken largely to. I shall now proceed to the

III. Third and last inconvenience, which the text mentions, of a sinful and vicious course of life; viz. that the final issue and consequence of these things is very dismal and miserable; "The end of those things is death." No fruit then when ye did these things; shame now that you come to reflect upon them; and misery and death at the last.

There are, indeed, almost innumerable considerations and arguments to discourage and deter men

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from sin; the unreasonableness of it in itself; the injustice, and disloyalty, and ingratitude of it in respect to God; the ill example of it to others: the cruelty of it to ourselves; the shame and dishonour that attends it; the grief and sorrow which it will cost us, if ever we be brought to a due sense of it; the trouble and horror of a guilty conscience, that will perpetually haunt us; but above all, the miserable event and sad issue of a wicked course of life continued in, and finally unrepented of. The temptations to sin may be alluring enough, and look upon us with a smiling countenance, and the commission may afford us a short and imperfect pleasure; but the remembrance of it will certainly be bitter, and the end of it miserable.

And this consideration is of all others the most apt to work upon the generality of men, especially upon the more obstinate and obdurate sort of sinners, and those whom no other arguments will penetrate—that, whatever the present pleasure and advantage of sin may be, it will be bitterness and misery in the end.

The two former inconveniencies of a sinful course which I lately discoursed of, viz. that sin is unprofitable, and that it is shameful, are very considerable, and ought to be great arguments against it to every sinner, and considerate man: and yet how light are they, and but as the very small dust upon the balance, in comparison of that insupportable weight of misery which will oppress the sinner at last! "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." This, this is the sting of all, that "the end of these things is death."

It is very usual, in Scripture, to express the great-

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est happiness and the greatest misery by life and death; life being the first and most desirable of all other blessings, because it is the foundation of them, and that which makes us capable of all the rest. Hence we find, in Scripture, that all the blessings of the gospel are summed up in this one word: (John xx. 31.) "These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (1 John iv. 9.) "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." So that under this term or notion of life, the Scripture is wont to express all happiness to us, and more especially that eternal life which is the great promise of the gospel. And this is life by way of eminency; as if this frail, and mortal, and miserable life which we live here in this world, did not deserve that name.

And, on the other hand, all the evils which are consequent upon sin, especially the dreadful and lasting misery of another world, are called by the name of death. "The end of these things is death." So the apostle, here in the text, and ver. 23. "The wages of sin is death;" not only a temporal death, but such a death as is opposed to eternal life: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." So that death here in the text is plainly intended to comprehend in it all those fearful and astonishing miseries, wherewith the wrath of God will pursue and afflict sinners in another world.

But what and how great this misery is, I am not able to declare to you; "it hath" no more "entered into the heart of man," than those great and glorious

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things which "God hath laid up for them that love him:" and as I would fain hope, that none of us here shall ever have the sad experience of it; so none but those who have felt it, are able to give a tolerable description of the intolerableness of it.

But by what the Scripture hath said of it in general, and in such metaphors as are most level to our present capacity, it appears so full of terror, that I am loath to attempt the representation of it. There are so many other arguments that are more humane and natural, and more proper to work upon the reason and ingenuity of men; as, the great love and kindness of God to us; the grievous sufferings of his Son for us; the unreasonableness and shamefulness of sin; the present benefit and advantage, the peace and pleasure, of a holy and virtuous life; and the mighty rewards promised to it in another world; that one would think these should be abundantly sufficient to prevail with men to gain them to goodness, and that they need not be frighted into it, and to have the law laid to them, as it was once given to the people of Israel, in "thunder and lightning, in blackness, in darkness and tempest," so as to make them "exceedingly to fear and tremble." And it seems a very hard case, that when we have to deal with men sensible enough of their interest in other cases, and diligent enough to mind it, we cannot persuade them to accept of happiness without setting before them the terrors of eternal darkness, and those amazing and endless miseries which will certainly be the portion of those who refuse so great a happiness: this, I say, seems very hard, that men must be carried to the gate of hell before they can be brought to set their faces towards heaven, and to think in good earnest of getting thither.

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And yet it cannot be dissembled, that the nature of men is so degenerate as to stand in need of this argument; and that men are so far engaged in an evil course, that they are not to be reclaimed from it by any other consideration but of the endless and unspeakable misery of impenitent sinners in another world. And therefore God, knowing how necessary this is, doth frequently make use of it; and our blessed Saviour, than whom none was ever more mild and gentle, doth often set this consideration before men, to take them off from sin, and to bring them to do better. And this, St. Paul tells us, (Rom. i. 18.) is one principal thing which renders the gospel so powerful an instrument for the reforming and saving of mankind, because "therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

So that, how harsh and unpleasant soever this argument may be, the great stupidity and folly of some men, and their inveterate obstinacy in an evil course, makes it necessary for us to press it home, that those who will not be moved, and made sensible of the danger and inconvenience of sin by gentler arguments, may be roused and awakened by the terrors of eternal misery.

That the last issue and consequence of a wicked life will be very miserable, the general apprehension of mankind concerning the fate of bad men in another world, and the secret misgivings of men's consciences, give men too much ground to fear. Besides that, the justice of Divine providence, which is not many times in this world so clear and manifest, does seem to require that there should be a time of recompence, when the virtue and patience of good men should be rewarded, and the insolence

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and obstinacy of bad men should be punished. This cannot but appear very reasonable to any man that considers the nature of God, and is persuaded that he governs the world, and hath given laws to mankind, by the observance whereof they may be happy, and by the neglect and contempt whereof they must be miserable.

But, that there might remain no doubts upon the minds of men concerning these matters, God hath been pleased to reveal this from heaven, by a person sent by him on purpose to declare it to the world; and to the truth of these doctrines concerning a future state, and a day of judgment, and recompences, God hath given testimony by unquestionable miracles wrought for the confirmation of them, and particularly by "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, whereby he hath given an assurance unto all men, that he is the person ordained by God to judge the world in righteousness, and to render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil."

So that, how quietly soever wicked men may pass through this world, or out of it (which they seldom do), misery will certainly overtake their sins at last; unspeakable and intolerable misery, arising from the anguish of a guilty conscience, from a lively apprehension of their sad loss, and from a quick sense of the sharp pain which they labour under; and all this aggravated and set off with the consideration of past pleasure, and the despair of future ease.

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Each of these is misery enough, and all of them together do constitute and make up that dismal and forlorn state which the Scripture calls hell and damnation.

I shall, therefore, briefly represent (for it is by no means desirable to dwell long upon so melancholy and frightful an argument),

First, The principal ingredients which constitute this miserable state. And,

Secondly, The aggravations of it.

First, The principal ingredients which constitute this miserable state; and they are these three which I have mentioned:

I. The anguish of a guilty mind.

II. The lively apprehensions of the invaluable happiness which they have lost.

III. A quick sense of the intolerable pains which they lie under.

I. The anguish of a guilty conscience. And this is natural; for there is a worm that abides in a guilty conscience, and is continually gnawing it. This is that our Saviour calls "the worm that dies not." And though God should inflict no positive punishment upon sinners, yet this is a revenge which every man's mind would take upon him; for things are so ordered by God in the original frame and constitution of our minds, that, on the one hand, peace and pleasure, contentment and satisfaction, do naturally arise in our minds from the conscience of well-doing, and spring up in the soul of every good man: and, on the other hand, no man knowingly does an evil action, but his guilty conscience galls him for it, and the remembrance of it is full of bitterness to him.

And this the sinner feels in this world; he dis-

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guiseth and dissembleth his trouble as much as he can, and shifts off these uneasy thoughts by all the diversions he can devise, and by this means palliates his disease, and renders his condition in some sort tolerable unto himself; but when he is alone, or cast upon the bed of sickness, and his thoughts are let loose upon him, and he hath nothing to give them a diversion, how does his guilt ferment and work! And the fever, which lurked before, does now shew itself, and is ready to burn him up; so that nothing can appear more dismal and ghastly, than such a man does to himself.

And much more, when sinners come into the other world, and are entered into the regions of darkness, and the melancholy shades where evil spirits are continually wandering up and down, where they can meet with nothing either of employment or pleasure, to give the least diversion to their pensive minds; where they shall find nothing to do, but to reflect upon and bemoan themselves; where all the wicked actions that ever they committed shall come fresh into their minds, and stare their consciences in the face. It is not to be imagined what sad scenes will then be present to their imaginations, and what sharp reflections their own guilty minds will make upon them, and what swarms of furies will possess them.

So soon as ever they are entered upon that state, they will then find themselves forsaken of all those comforts which they once placed so much happiness in; and they will have nothing to converse with but their own uneasy selves, and those that are as miserable as themselves, and therefore incapable of administering any comfort to one another. They will then have nothing to think on but what will trouble

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them; and every new thought will be a new increase of their trouble. Their guilt will make them restless, and the more restless they are, the more will their minds be enraged; and there will be no end of their vexation, because the cause and ground of it is perpetual. For there is no possible way to get rid of guilt but by repentance; and there is no encouragement, no argument, to repentance, where there is no hope of pardon. So that if God should hold his hand and leave sinners to themselves, and to the lashes of their own conscience, a more severe and terrible torment can hardly be imagined, than that which a guilty mind would execute upon itself.

II. Another ingredient into the miseries of sinners in another world, is the lively apprehension of the invaluable happiness which they have lost by their own obstinacy and foolish choice. In the next world wicked men shall be for ever separated from God, who is the fountain of happiness, and from all the comforts of his presence and favour. This, our Saviour tells us, is the first part of that dreadful sentence that shall be passed upon the wicked at the great day, "Depart from me;" which words, though they do not signify any positive infliction and torment, yet they import the greatest loss that can be imagined. And it is not so easy to determine which is the greatest of evils, loss or pain. Indeed, to a creature that is only endowed with sense, there can be no misery but that of pain and suffering: but to those who have reason and understanding, and are capable of knowing the value of things, and of reflecting upon themselves in the want of them, the greatest loss may be as grievous and hard to be borne as the greatest pain.

It is true, that sinners are now so immersed in the

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gross and sensual delights of this world, that they have no apprehension of the joys of heaven, and the pleasures of God's presence, and of the happiness that is to be enjoyed in communion with him, and therefore they are not now capable of estimating the greatness of this loss. But this insensibleness of wicked men continues no longer than this present state, which affords them variety of objects of pleasure and of business to divert them and entertain them: but when they come into the other world, they shall then have nothing else to think upon, but the sad condition into which they have brought themselves, nothing to do but to pore and meditate upon their own misfortune, when they shall lift up their eyes, and, with the rich man in the parable, in the midst of their torments, look up to those who are in Abraham's bosom; and their misery will be mightily increased by the contemplation of that happiness which others enjoy, and themselves have so foolishly forfeited and fallen short of; insomuch, that it would be happy for them if that God, from whose presence they are banished, that heaven from which they have excluded themselves, and that everlasting glory which they have despised and neglected, might be for ever hid from their eyes, and never come into their minds.

III. This is not all, but besides the sad apprehension of their loss, they shall endure the sharpest pains. These God hath threatened sinners withal, and they are in Scripture represented to us, by the most grievous and intolerable pains that in this world we are acquainted withal; as, by the pain of burning. Hence the wicked are said to be "cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, and into the fire which is not quenched;" which,



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whether it be literally to be understood or not, is certainly intended to signify the most severe kind of torment; but what that is, and in what manner it shall be inflicted, none know but they that feel it, and lie under it. The Scripture tells so much in general of it, as is enough to warn men to avoid it; that it is the effect of a mighty displeasure, and of anger armed with omnipotence, and consequently must needs be very terrible, more dreadful than we can now conceive, and probably greater than can be described by any of those pains and sufferings which now we are acquainted withal; for "who knows the power of God's anger," and the utmost of what almighty justice can do to sinners? Who can comprehend the vast significancy of those expressions, "Fear him who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell?" And again, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" One would think this were misery enough, and needed no farther aggravation; and yet it hath two terrible ones, from the consideration of past pleasures which sinners have enjoyed in this world, and from an utter despair of future ease and remedy.

1. From the consideration of the past pleasures which sinners have enjoyed in this life. This will make their sufferings much more sharp and sensible; for, as nothing commends pleasure more, and give happiness a quicker taste and relish, than precedent sufferings and pain, there is not perhaps a greater pleasure in the world, than the strange and sudden ease which a man finds after a sharp fit of the stone or cholic, or after a man is taken off the rack, and nature which was in an agony before is all at once set at perfect ease: so, on the other hand,

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nothing exasperates suffering more, and sets a keener edge upon misery, than to step into afflictions and pain immediately out of a state of great ease and pleasure. This we find in the parable was the great aggravation of the rich man's torment, that he had first received good things, and was afterwards tormented. We may do well to consider this, that those pleasures of sin which have now so much of temptation in them, will in the next world be one of the chief aggravations of our torment.

2. The greatest aggravation of this misery will be, that it is attended with the despair of any future ease; and when misery and despair meet together, they make a man completely miserable. The duration of this misery is expressed to us in Scripture, by such words as are used to signify the longest and most interminable duration. "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire," (Matt. xxv. 41.) "Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," (Mark ix. 44.) And (2 Thess. i. 7.) it is there said, that "those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son, shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." And (Rev. xx. 10.) that "the wicked shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." And what can be imagined beyond this? This is the perfection of misery, to lie under the greatest torment, and yet be in despair of ever finding the least ease.

And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to from this text; viz. The manifest inconveniencies of a sinful and vicious course of life; that it brings no present benefit or advantage to us; that the reflection upon it causeth shame;



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and that it is fearful and miserable in the last issue and consequence of it. " What fruit had you," &c.

I should now have proceeded to the second part of the text, which represents to us the manifold advantages of a holy and virtuous course of life: (ver. 22.) " But now being made free from sin and become the servants of righteousness, ye have your fruit unto holiness;" there is the present advantage of it: " and the end everlasting life;" there is the future reward of it. But this is a large argument, which will require a discourse by itself, and therefore I shall not now enter upon it; but shall only make some reflections upon what hath been said, concerning the miserable issue and consequence of a wicked life impenitently persisted in.

And surely, if we firmly believe and seriously consider these things, we have no reason to be fond of any vice; we can take no great comfort or contentment in a sinful course. If we could, for the seeming advantage and short pleasure of some sins, dispense with the temporal mischiefs and inconveniencies of them, which yet I cannot see how any prudent and considerate man could do: if we could conquer shame, and bear the infamy and reproach which attends most sins, and could digest the upbraidings of our own consciences, so often as we call them to remembrance, and reflect seriously upon them; though for the gratifying an importunate inclination, and an impetuous appetite, all the inconveniencies of them might be born withal; yet methinks the very thought of the end and issue of a wicked life, that " the end of these things is death," that " indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," far greater than we can now describe, or imagine, " shall be to every soul of man that doeth

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evil," should overrule us. Though the violence of an irregular lust and desire are able to bear down all other arguments, yet methinks the eternal interest of our precious and immortal souls should still lie near our hearts, and affect us very sensibly. Methinks the consideration of another world, and of all eternity, and of that dismal fate which attends impenitent sinners after this life, and the dreadful hazard of being miserable for ever, should be more than enough to dishearten any man from a wicked life, and to bring him to a better mind and course.

And if the plain representations of these things do not prevail with men to this purpose, it is a sign that either they do not believe these things, or else that they do not consider them; one of these two must be the reason why any man, notwithstanding these terrible threatenings of God's word, does venture to continue in an evil course.

It is vehemently to be suspected, that men do not really believe these things, that they are not fully persuaded that there is another state after this life, in which the righteous God "will render to every man according to his deeds:" and, therefore, so much wickedness as we see in the lives of men, so much infidelity may reasonably be suspected to lie lurking in their hearts. They may indeed seemingly profess to believe these things; but he that would know what a man inwardly and firmly believes should attend rather to his actions than to his verbal professions: for if any man lives so, as no man that believes the principles of the Christian religion in reason can live, there is too much reason to question whether that man doth believe his religion; he may say he does, but there is a far greater

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evidence in the case than words; the actions of the man are by far the most credible declarations of the inward sense and persuasion of his mind.

Did men firmly and heartily believe that there is a God that governs the world, and regards the actions of men, and that "he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness," and that all mankind shall appear before him in that day, and every action that they have done in their whole lives shall be brought upon the stage, and pass a strict examination and censure, and that those who have made conscience of their duty to God and men, and have "lived soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," shall be unspeakably and eternally happy in the next; but those who have lived lewd and licentious lives, and persisted in an impenitent course, shall be extremely and everlastingly miserable, without pity, and without comfort, and without remedy, and without hope of ever being otherwise; I say, if men were fully and firmly persuaded of these things, it is not credible, it is hardly possible that they should live such profane and impious, such careless and dissolute lives, as we daily see a great part of mankind do.

That man that can be awed from his duty, or tempted to sin, by any of the pleasures or terrors of this world, that for the present enjoyment of his lusts can be contented to venture his soul, what greater evidence than this can there be, that this man does not believe the threatenings of the gospel, and how "fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God?" That man that can be willing to undergo a hard service for several years, that he may be in a way to get an estate, and be rich in this

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world, and yet will not be persuaded to restrain himself of his liberty, or to deny his pleasure, or to check his appetite or lust, for the greatest reward that God can promise, or the severest punishment that he can threaten; can any man reasonably think, that this man is persuaded of any such happiness or misery after this life, as is plainly revealed in the gospel, that "verily there is a reward for the righteous, and verily there is a God that judgeth the earth?" For what can he that believes not one syllable of the Bible do worse than this comes to?

A strong and vigorous faith, even in temporal cases, is a powerful principle of action, especially if it be backed and enforced with arguments of fear. He that believes the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and that it may be attained, and that if he doth attain it, it will make him very happy, and that without it he shall be extremely miserable; such a belief and persuasion will put a man upon difficult things, and make him to put forth a vigorous endeavour, and to use a mighty industry for the obtaining of that, concerning which he is thus persuaded.

And the faith of the gospel ought to be so much the more powerful, by how much the objects of hope and fear, which it presents to us, are greater and more considerable. Did men fully believe the happiness of heaven, and the torments of hell, and were they as verily persuaded of the truth of them, as if they were before their eyes, how insignificant would all the terrors and temptations of sense be to draw them into sin, and seduce them from their duty?

But, although it seems very strange, and almost

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incredible, that men should believe these things, and yet live wicked and impious lives; yet, because I have no mind, and God knows there is no need, to increase the number of infidels in this age, I shall choose rather to impute a great deal of the wickedness that is in the world to the inconsiderateness of men, than to their unbelief. I will grant that they do in some sort believe these things, or at least that they do not disbelieve them; and then the great cause of men's ruin must be, that they do not attend to the consequence of this belief, and how men ought to live that are thus persuaded. Men stifle their reason, and suffer themselves to be hurried away by sense, into the embraces of sensual objects and things present, but do not consider what the end of these things will be, and what is like to become of them hereafter; for it is not to be imagined, but that that man who shall calmly consider with himself what sin is, the shortness of its pleasure, and the eternity of its punishment, should seriously resolve upon a better course of life.

And why do we not consider these things, which are of so infinite concernment to us? What have we our reason for, but to reflect upon ourselves, and to mind what we do, and wisely to compare things together, and, upon the whole matter, to judge what makes most for our true and lasting interest? To consider our whole selves, our souls as well as our bodies, and our whole duration, not only in this world, but in the other, not only with regard to time, but to eternity? To look before us to the last issue and event of our actions, and to the farthest consequence of them, and to reckon upon what will be hereafter, as well as what is present; and if we suspect, or hope, or fear, especially if we

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have good reason to believe, a future state after death, in which we shall be happy or miserable to all eternity, according as we manage and behave ourselves in this world, to resolve to make it our greatest design and concernment while we are in this world, so to live and demean ourselves, that we may be of the number of those that shall be accounted worthy to escape that misery, and to obtain that happiness, which will last and continue for ever?

And if men would but apply their minds seriously to the consideration of these things, they could not act so imprudently as they do; they would not live so by chance, and without design, taking the pleasure that comes next, and avoiding the present evils which press upon them, without any regard to those that are future, and at a distance, though they be infinitely greater and more considerable: if men could have the patience to debate and argue these matters with themselves, they could not live so preposterously as they do, preferring their bodies before their souls, and the world before God, and the things which are temporal before the things that are eternal.

Did men verily and in good earnest believe but half of that to be true which hath now been declared to you, concerning the miserable state of impenitent sinners in another world; (and I am very sure, that the one half of that which is true concerning that state hath not been told you;) I say, did we in any measure believe what hath been so imperfectly represented, "What manner of persons should we all be, in all holy conversation and godliness, waiting for and hastening unto (that is, making haste to

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make the best preparation we could for) the coming of the day of God!"

I will conclude all with our Saviour's exhortation to his disciples, and to all others; "Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of man:—to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen."

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# SERMON CLXV.

## THE PRESENT AND FUTURE ADVANTAGE OF A HOLY AND VIRTUOUS LIFE.

*What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*—ROM. vi. 21, 22.

I HAVE several times told you, that the apostle in these words makes a comparison between a holy and virtuous, and a sinful and vicious course of life, and sets before us the manifest inconveniences of the one, and the manifold advantages of the other.

I have finished my discourse upon the first part of the comparison—the manifest inconveniences of a sinful and vicious course. I proceed now to the other part of the comparison, which was the

Second thing I propounded to speak to from these words; viz. the manifold benefits and advantages of a holy and virtuous course; and that upon these two accounts:

First, Of the present benefit and advantage of it, which the apostle here calls fruit, "Ye have your fruit unto holiness."

Secondly, In respect of the future reward of it, "and the end everlasting life." So that here is a considerable earnest in hand, besides a mighty recompence afterwards, infinitely beyond the proportion of our best actions and services, both in regard of the greatness and duration of it, "everla-

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ing life;" that is, for a few transient acts of obedience, a perfect, and immutable, and endless state of happiness. And these two the apostle mentions in opposition to the inconveniencies and evil consequences of a wicked and vicious course; "What fruit had you then in those things?" &c.

But before I come to speak to these two particulars, I shall take notice of the description which the apostle here makes of the change from a state of sin and vice to a state of holiness and virtue. "But now, being made free from sin, and become the servants of God;" intimating that the state of sin is a state of servitude and slavery, from which repentance and the change which is thereby made does set us free; "But now, being made free from sin." And so our Saviour tells us, that "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin;" and this is the vilest and hardest slavery in the world, because it is the servitude of the soul, the best and noblest part of ourselves; it is the subjection of our reason, which ought to rule and bear sway over the inferior faculties, to our sensual appetites and brutish passions; which is as uncomely a sight, as to see beggars ride on horseback, and princes walk on foot. And as inferior persons, when they are advanced to power, are strangely insolent and tyrannical towards those that are subject to them; so the lusts and passions of men, when they once get the command of them, are the most domineering tyrants in the world; and there is no such slave as a man that is subject to his appetite and lust, that is under the power of irregular passions and vicious inclinations, which transport and hurry him to the vilest and most unreasonable things. For a wicked man is a slave to as many masters as he hath passions and vices: and they are

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very imperious and exacting; and the more he yields to them, the more they grow upon him, and exercise the greater tyranny over him; and being subject to so many masters, the poor slave is continually divided and distracted between their contrary commands and impositions; one passion hurries him one way, and another as violently drives him another; one lust commands him upon such a service, and another, it may be, at the same time calls him to another work. His pride and ambition bids him spend and lay it out, whilst his covetousness holds his hand fast closed; so that he knows not many times how to dispose of himself, or what to do, he must displease some of his masters, and what inclination soever he contradicts, he certainly displeaseth himself.

And that which aggravates the misery of his condition is, that he voluntarily submits to this servitude. In other cases men are made slaves against their wills, and are brought under the force and power of others, whom they are not able to resist; but the sinner chooseth this servitude, and willingly puts his neck under this yoke. There are few men in the world so sick of their liberty, and so weary of their own happiness, as to choose this condition; but the sinner sells himself, and voluntarily parts with that liberty which he might keep, and which none could take from him.

And, which makes this condition yet more intolerable, he makes himself a slave to his own servants, to those who are born to be subject to him, to his own appetites and passions; and this certainly is the worst kind of slavery, so much worse than that of mines and galleys, as the soul is more noble and excellent than the body.

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Men are not usually so sensible of the misery of this kind of servitude, because they are governed by sense more than reason; but, according to a true judgment and estimation of things, a vicious course of life is the saddest slavery of all others. And therefore the gospel represents it as a design every way worthy of the Son of God, to come down from heaven, and to debase himself so far as to assume our nature, and to submit to the death of the cross, on purpose to rescue us from this slavery, and to assert us into "the liberty of the sons of God." And this is the great design of the doctrine of the gospel, to free men from the bondage of their lusts, and to bring them to the service of God, "whose service is perfect freedom." And therefore our Saviour tells us, (John viii. 31, 32.) that "if we continue in his word," *i. e.* if we obey his doctrine, and frame our lives according to it, it will make us free; "Ye shall know (says he) the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And if we observe it, the Scripture delights very much to set forth to us the benefits and advantages of the Christian religion by the metaphor of liberty and redemption from captivity and slavery. Hence our Saviour is so often called the Redeemer and Deliverer, and is said to have "obtained eternal redemption for us." And the publishing of the gospel is compared to the proclaiming of the year of jubilee among the Jews, when all persons that would were set at liberty. (Isa. lxi. 1, 2.) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," saith the prophet, speaking in the person of the Messiah, "because he hath anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And it is probable that upon this account, likewise, the Christ-

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ian doctrine or law is by St. James called "the royal law of liberty."

This is the great design of Christianity, to set men free from the slavery of their lusts; and to this end the apostle tells us, (Tit. ii. 14.) that "Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And herein the great mercy and compassion of God towards mankind appeared, in that he sent his Son to rescue us from that servitude which we had long groaned under, "that, being made free from sin, we might become the servants of God," and "the servants of righteousness."

And this he hath done, not only by the price of his blood, but by the power and purity of his doctrine, and the holy example of his life, and by all those considerations which represent to us the misery of our sinful state, and the infinite danger of continuing in it; and, on the other hand, by setting before us the advantages of a religious and holy life; and what a blessed change we make, when we quit the service of sin, and become the servants of God. It will not only be a mighty present benefit to us, but will make us happy to all eternity; and these are the two considerations which, at first, I propounded to speak to at this time:

First, The present benefit of a holy and virtuous life, which the apostle here calls fruit; "But now being free from sin, and become the servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness."

Secondly, The future reward and recompence of it; "and the end everlasting life."

First, Let us consider the present benefit and advantage of a holy and virtuous life, which the apostle here calls fruit. If all things be truly considered,

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there is no advantage comes to any man by a wicked and vicious course of life. A wicked life is no present advantage; the reflection upon it afterwards is shameful and troublesome, and the end of it miserable: but, on the contrary, the advantages of a holy and good life are many and great even in this world, and upon temporal accounts, abstracting from the consideration of a future reward in the world to come.

I shall instance in five or six eminent advantages which it usually brings to men in this world.

I. It brings great peace and contentment of mind.

II. It is a very fit and proper means to promote our outward temporal interest.

III. It tends to the lengthening our days, and hath frequently the blessing of long life attending upon it.

IV. It gives a man great peace and comfort when he comes to die.

V. After death it transmits a good name and reputation to posterity.

VI. It derives a blessing upon our posterity after us. And these are certainly the greatest blessings that a wise man can aim at, and design to himself in this world. Every one of these taken severally is very considerable; but all of them together complete a man's temporal felicity, and raise it to as high a pitch as is to be expected in this world.

I. A religious and virtuous course of life is the best way to peace and contentment of mind, and does commonly bring it. And to a wise man, that knows how to value the ease and satisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater temptation to religion and virtue, than to consider that it is the best and only way to give rest to his mind. And this

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is present fruit, and ready payment; because it immediately follows, or rather accompanies, the discharge of our duty. "The fruit of righteousness is peace," saith the prophet; and the apostle to the Hebrews speaks of "the peaceable fruit of righteousness," meaning that inward peace which a righteous man hath in his own mind.

A man needs not to take pains, or to use many arguments, to satisfy and content his own mind, after he hath done a good action, and to convince himself that he hath no cause to be troubled for it, for peace and pleasure do naturally spring from it: nay, not only so, but there is an unexpressible kind of pleasure and delight that flows from the testimony of a good conscience. Let but a man take care to satisfy himself in the doing of his duty, and whatever troubles and storms may be raised from without, all will be clear and calm within: for nothing but guilt can trouble a man's mind, and fright his conscience, and make him uneasy to himself; that indeed will wound his spirit, and sting his very soul, and make him full of fearful and tormenting thoughts. This Cain found after he had committed that crying sin of murdering his brother. (Gen. iv. 6.) "The Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?" His guilt made him full of wrath, and discontent filled his mind with vexation, and his countenance with shame and confusion. When a man's conscience is awakened to a sense of his guilt it is angry and froward, and harder to be stilled than a peevish child; but the practice of holiness and virtue does produce just the contrary effects; it fills a man's mind with pleasure, and makes his countenance cheerful.

And this certainly, if it be well considered, is no



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small and contemptible advantage. The peace and tranquillity of our minds is the great thing which all the philosophy and wisdom of the world did always design to bring men to, as the very utmost happiness that a wise man is capable of in this life: and it is that which no considerate man would part with for all that this world can give him. The greatest fortune in this world ought to be no temptation to any man in his wits, to submit to perpetual sickness and pain for the gaining of it; and yet there is no disease in the world, that for the sharpness of it is comparable to the sting of a guilty mind, and no pleasure equal to that of innocence and a good conscience. And this naturally springs up in the mind of a good man, where it is not hindered either by a melancholy temper, or by false principles in religion, which fill a man with groundless fears and jealousies of the love and favour of God towards him; and excepting these two cases, this is the ordinary fruit of a holy and good course, which is not interrupted by frequent falling into sin, and great omissions and violations of our duty: for in this case the interruptions of our peace and comfort will naturally be answerable to the inequality of our obedience.

II. Besides the present and inestimable fruit of holiness, the quiet and satisfaction of our own minds; it is likewise a proper means to promote our interest and happiness in this world. For as every vice is naturally attended with some temporal inconvenience of pain or loss; so there is no grace or virtue, but does apparently conduce to a man's temporal felicity. There are some virtues which tend to the health of his body, and the prolonging of his life, as temperance and chastity; others tend to riches and

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plenty, as diligence and industry in our callings; others to the secure and peaceable enjoyment of what we have, as truth and fidelity, justice and honesty in all our dealings and intercourse with men. There are other virtues that are apt to oblige mankind to us, and to gain their friendship and goodwill, their aid and assistance, as kindness, and meekness, and charity, and a generous disposition to do good to all, as far as we have power and opportunity. In a word, there is no real interest of this world but may ordinarily be as effectually promoted and pursued to as great advantage by a man that exercises himself in the practice of all virtue and goodness, and usually to far greater advantage, than by one that is intemperate and debauched, deceitful and dishonest, apt to disoblige and provoke, sour and ill-natured to all mankind: for there is none of these vices but is to a man's real hinderance and disadvantage, in regard of one kind of happiness or another, which men aim at and propose to themselves in this world.

III. A religious and virtuous course of life doth naturally tend to the prolonging of our days, and hath very frequently the blessing of health and long life attending upon it. The practice of a great many virtues is a great preservative of life and health, as, the due government of our appetites and passions, by temperance, and chastity, and meekness, which prevent the chief causes from within of bodily diseases and distempers; the due government of our tongues and conversation in respect of others, by justice and kindness, and abstaining from wrath and provocation, which are a great security against the dangers of outward violence, according to that of St. Peter, (1 Epist. iii. 10.) " He



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that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it."

And beside the natural tendency of things, there is a special blessing of God which attends good men, and makes "their days long in the land which the Lord their God hath given them."

IV. There is nothing gives a man so much comfort when he comes to die, as the reflection upon a holy and good life: and then surely, above all other times, comfort is most valuable, because our frail and infirm nature doth then stand most in need of it. Then usually men's hearts are faint, and their spirits low, and every thing is apt to deject and trouble them; so that we had need to provide ourselves of some excellent cordial against that time; and there is no comfort like to that of a clear conscience, and of an innocent and useful life. This will revive and raise a man's spirits under all the infirmities of his body, because it gives a man good hopes concerning his eternal state, and the hopes of that are apt to fill a man with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

The difference between good and bad men is never so remarkable in this world, as when they are upon their death-bed. This the Scripture observes to us. (Psal. xxxvii. 37.) "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

With what triumph and exultation doth the blessed apostle St. Paul, upon the review of his life, discourse concerning his death and dissolution? (2 Tim. iv. 6—8.) "I am now ready (says he) to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at

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hand: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day." What would not any of us do to be thus affected when we come to leave the world, and to be able to bear the thoughts of death and eternity with so quiet and well satisfied a mind! Why, let us but endeavour to live holy lives, and to be useful and serviceable to God in our generation, as this holy apostle was, and we shall have the same ground of joy and triumph which he had. For this is the proper and genuine effect of virtue and goodness; "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." All the good actions that we do in this life are so many seeds of comfort sown in our own consciences, which will spring up one time or other, but especially in the approaches of death, when we come to take a serious review of our lives; for then men's consciences use to deal plainly and impartially with them, and to tell them the truth; and if at that time more especially "our hearts condemn us not, then may we have comfort and confidence towards God."

V. A holy and virtuous life doth transmit a good name and reputation to posterity. And this Solomon hath determined to be a much greater happiness, than for a man to leave a great estate behind him: "A good name (says he) is rather to be chosen than great riches." Pious and virtuous men do commonly gain to themselves a good esteem and reputation in this world, while they are in it; but the virtues of good men are not always so bright and shining as to meet with that respect and

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acknowledgment which is due to them in this world. Many times they are much clouded by the infirmities and passions which attend them, and are shadowed by some affected singularities and morosities, which those which have lived more retired from the world are more liable to. Besides that, the envy of others, who are not so good as they, lies heavy upon them, and does depress them. For bad men are very apt to misinterpret the best actions of the good, and put false colours upon them, and when they have nothing else to object against them, to charge them with hypocrisy and insincerity; an objection as hard to be answered, as it is to be made good, unless we could see into the hearts of men.

But when good men are dead and gone, and the bright and shining example of their virtues is at a convenient distance, and does not gall and upbraid others, then envy ceaseth, and every man is then content to give a good man his due praise, and his friends and posterity may then quietly enjoy the comfort of his reputation, which is some sort of blessing to him that is gone. This difference Solomon observes to us between good and bad men; "The memory of the just is blessed," or well spoke of; "but the name of the wicked shall rot."

VI. And lastly, religion and virtue do derive a blessing upon our posterity after us. "O that there were such a heart in them (saith Moses, concerning the people of Israel), that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children for ever!" And to this purpose there are many promises in Scripture of God's blessing the posterity of the righteous, and his shewing mercy "to thou-

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sands of the children of them that love him, and keep his commandments."

And this is a great motive to obedience, and toucheth upon that natural affection which men bear to their children; so that if we have any regard to them, or concernment for their happiness, we ought to be very careful of our duty, and afraid to offend God: because, according as we demean ourselves towards him, we entail a lasting blessing or a great curse upon our children; by so many and so strong bonds hath God tied our duty upon us, that if we either desire our own happiness, or the happiness of those that are dearest to us, and part of ourselves, we must "fear God, and keep his commandments."

And thus I have briefly represented to you some of the chief benefits and advantages which a holy and virtuous life does commonly bring to men in this world, which is the first encouragement mentioned in the text; "Ye have your fruit unto holiness."

Before I proceed to the second, I shall only just take notice, by way of application of what has been said on this argument,

1. That it is a great encouragement to well-doing, to consider that ordinarily piety and goodness are no hinderance to a man's temporal felicity, but very frequently great promoters of it; so that, excepting only the case of persecution for religion, I think I may safely challenge any man to shew me how the practice of any part or duty of religion, how the exercise of any grace or virtue, is to the prejudice of a man's temporal interest, or does debar him of any true pleasure, or hinder him of any real advantage, which a prudent and considerate man would think

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fit to choose. And as for persecution and sufferings for religion, God can reward us for them, if he please, in this world; and we have all the assurance that we can desire, that he will do it abundantly in the next.

2. The hope of long life, and especially of a quiet and comfortable death, should be a great encouragement to a holy and virtuous life. He that lives well, takes the best course to live long, and lays in for a happy old age, free from the diseases and infirmities which are naturally procured by a vicious youth, and likewise free from the guilt and galling remembrance of a wicked life. And there is no condition which we can fall into in this world, that does so clearly discover the difference between a good and bad man, as a death-bed: for then the good man begins most sensibly to enjoy the comforts of well-doing, and the sinner to taste the bitter fruits of sin. What a wide difference is then to be seen between the hopes and fears of these two sorts of persons! and surely, next to the actual possession of blessedness, the good hopes and comfortable prospect of it are the greatest happiness; and next to actual sense of pain, the fear of suffering is the greatest torment.

Though there were nothing beyond this life to be expected, yet if men were sure to be possessed with these delightful or troublesome passions when they come to die, no man that wisely considers things would, for all the pleasures of sin, forfeit the comfort of a righteous soul leaving this world full of the hope of immortality; and endure the vexation and anguish of a guilty conscience, and that infinite terror and amazement which so frequently possesseth the soul of a dying sinner.

3. If there be any spark of a generous mind in us,

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it should animate us to do well, that we may be well spoken of when we are gone off the stage, and may transmit a grateful memory of our lives to those that shall be after us. I proceed now to the

Second thing I proposed, as the great advantage indeed; viz. The glorious reward of a holy and virtuous life in another world, which is here called "everlasting life"—"and the end everlasting life;" by which the apostle intends to express to us, both the happiness of our future state, and the way and means whereby we are prepared and made meet to be made partakers of it; and that is by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy and good life. For it is they only that "have their fruit unto holiness," whose end shall be "everlasting life." I shall speak briefly to these two, and so conclude my discourse upon this text.

I. The happiness of our future state, which is here expressed by the name of "everlasting life," in very few words, but such as are of wonderful weight and significancy: for they import the excellency of this state, and the eternity of it. And who is sufficient to speak to either of these arguments? both of them are too big to enter now into the heart of man, too vast and boundless to be comprehended by human understanding, and too unwieldy to be managed by the tongue of men and angels, answerable to the unspeakable greatness and glory of them. And if I were able to declare them unto you, as they deserved, you would not be able to hear me. And therefore I shall choose to say but little upon an argument of which I can never say enough, and shall very briefly consider those two things which are comprehended in that short description which the text gives us of our future happiness, by the name of

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"everlasting life;" viz. The excellency of this state, and the eternity of it.

1. The excellency of it, which is here represented to us under the notion of life, the most desirable of all other things, because it is the foundation of all other enjoyments whatsoever. Barely to be in being, and to be sensible that we are so, is but a dry notion of life. The true notion of life is to be well and to be happy, *vivere est bene valere*. They who are in the most miserable condition that can be imagined are in being, and sensible also that they are miserable. But this kind of life is so far from coming under the true notion of life, that the Scripture calls it "the second death." (Rev. xxi. 8.) It is there said, that "the wicked shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." And, (chap. xx. 6.) "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death shall have no power." So that a state of mere misery and torment is not life but death; nay, the Scripture will not allow the life of a wicked man in this world to be true life, but speaks of him as dead: (Ephes. ii. 1.) speaking of the sinners among the gentiles, "You (saith the apostle) hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And, which is more yet, the Scripture calls a life of sinful pleasures (which men esteem the only happiness of this world), the Scripture, I say, calls this a death. (1 Tim. v. 6.) "She that liveth in pleasure, is dead whilst she liveth." A lewd and unprofitable life, which serves to no good end and purpose, is a death rather than a life. Nay, that decaying and dying life which we now live in this world, and which is allayed by the mixture of so many infirmities and pains, of so much

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trouble and sorrow; I say, that even this sort of life, for all that we are so fondly in love with it, does hardly deserve the name of life. But the life of the world to come, of which we now speak, this is life indeed; to do those things which we were made for, to serve the true ends of our being, and to enjoy the comfort and reward of so doing, this is the true notion of life; and whatever is less than this, is death, or a degree of it, and approach towards it. And therefore very well may heaven and happiness be described by the notion of life, because truly to live and to be happy are words that signify the same thing.

But what kind of life this is, I can no more describe to you in the particularities of it, than Columbus could have described the particular manners and customs of the people of America, before he or any other person in these parts of the world had seen it or been there. But this I can say of it in general, and that from the infallible testimony of the great Creator and glorious inhabitants of that blessed place, that it is a state of pure pleasure and unmingled joys, of pleasures more manly, more spiritual, and more refined, than any of the delights of sense, consisting in the enlargement of our minds and knowledge to a greater degree, and in the perfect exercise of love and friendship, in the conversation of the best and wisest company, free from self-interest, and all those unsociable passions of envy and jealousy, of malice and ill-will, which spoil the comfort of all conversation in this world; and, in a word, free from all other passion or design but an ardent and almost equal desire to contribute all, that by all means possible they can, to the mutual happiness of one another: for charity reigns in

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heaven, and is the brightest grace and virtue in the firmament of glory, far outshining all other; as St. Paul, who had himself been taken up into the third heaven, does expressly declare to us.

Farther yet, this blessed state consists more particularly in these two things: in having our bodies raised and refined to a far greater purity and perfection than ever they had in this world; and in the consequent happiness of the whole man, soul and body, so strictly and firmly united as never to be parted again, and so equally matched as to be no trouble or impediment to one another.

(1.) In having our bodies raised and refined to a greater purity and perfection than ever they had in this world. Our bodies, as they are now, are unequally tempered, and in a perpetual flux and change, continually tending to corruption, because made up of such contrary principles and qualities as by their perpetual conflict are always at work, conspiring the ruin and dissolution of them: but when they are raised again, they shall be so tempered and so refined, as to be free from all those destructive qualities which do now threaten their change and dissolution: and though they shall still consist of matter, yet they shall be purified to that degree, as to partake of the immortality of our souls, to which they shall be united, and to be of equal duration with them. So the Scripture tells us, (1 Cor. xv. 52, 53.) "That our dead bodies shall be raised incorruptible: for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

Our bodies, when they are laid in the grave, are vile carcasses, but they shall be raised again beautiful and glorious, and as different from what they

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were before, as the heavenly mansions, in which they are to reside for ever, are from that dark cell of the grave out of which they are raised; and shall then be endowed with such a life, and strength, and vigour, as to be able, without any change or decay, to abide and continue for ever in the same state.

Our bodies in this world are gross flesh and blood, liable to be affected with natural and sensual pleasures, and to be afflicted with natural pains and diseases; to be pressed with the natural necessities of hunger and thirst, and obnoxious to all those changes and accidents to which all natural things are subject: but "they shall be raised spiritual bodies," pure and refined from all the dregs of matter; they shall not hunger, nor thirst, nor be diseased, or in pain any more.

"These houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust," are continually decaying; and, therefore, stand in need of continual reparation by food and physic: but "our house, which is from heaven" (as the apostle calls it) shall be of such lasting and durable materials, as not only time, but even eternity itself, shall make no impression upon it, or cause the least decay in it. "They (says our blessed Saviour) who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, cannot die any more: but shall be like the angels, and are the children of God;" *i. e.* shall in some degree partake of the felicity and immortality of God himself, "who is always the same, and whose years fail not." Nay, the apostle expressly tells us, that our bodies after the resurrection shall be spiritual bodies, so that we shall then be as it were all spirit, and our bodies shall be so raised and refined, that they shall be no clog or impediment to

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the operation of our souls. And it must needs be a great comfort to us whilst we are in this world, to live in the hopes of so happy and glorious a change; when we consider how our bodies do now oppress our spirits, and what a melancholy and dead weight they are upon them, how grievous an incumbrance, and trouble, and temptation they are, for the most part, to us in this mortal state.

(2.) The blessedness of this state consists, likewise, in the consequent happiness of the whole man, soul and body, so strictly and firmly united as never to be parted again, and so equally matched as to be no trouble and impediment to one another.

In this world the soul and body are for the most part very unequally yoked, so that the soul is not only darkened by the gross fumes and clouds which rise from the body, but loaded and oppressed by the dull weight of it, which it very heavily lugs on and draws after it; and the soul, likewise, and the vicious inclinations, and the irregular passions of it, have many times an ill influence upon the body and the humours of it. But in the next world they shall both be purified, the one from sin, and the other from frailty and corruption, and both be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of the ever-blessed God.

But the consideration of this (as I said before) is too big for our narrow apprehensions in this mortal state, and an argument not fit to be treated of by such children as the wisest of men are in this world; and whenever we attempt to speak of it, we do but lisp like children, and understand like children, and reason like children about it; "That which is imperfect must be done away," and our souls must be raised to a greater perfection, and our understand-

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ings filled with a stronger and steadier light, before we can be fit to engage in so profound a contemplation. We must first have been in heaven, and possessed of that felicity and glory which is there to be enjoyed, before we can either speak or think of it in any measure as it deserves. In the meantime, whenever we set about it, we shall find our faculties oppressed and dazzled with the weight and splendour of so great and glorious an argument; like St. Paul, who, when he "was caught up into paradise," saw and heard those things which, when he came down again into this world, he was not able to express, and which it was not possible for the tongue of man to utter.

So that in discoursing of the state of the blessed, we must content ourselves with what the Scripture hath revealed in general concerning it; that it is a state of perfect freedom from all those infirmities and imperfections, those evils and miseries, those sins and temptations which we are liable to in this world. So St. John describes the glory and felicity of that state, as they were in visions represented to him: (Rev. xxi. 2—4.) "And I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away:" that is, all those evils which we saw or suffered in this world, shall for ever vanish and disappear; and, which is the great privilege and

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felicity of all, that there shall no sin be there: (ver. 27.) "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth; and, consequently, there shall be no misery and curse there." So we read, (chap. xxii. 3, 4.) "And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face." In which last words our employment and our happiness are expressed; but what in particular our employment shall be, and wherein it shall consist, is impossible now to describe; it is sufficient to know in the general, that our employment shall be our unspeakable pleasure, and every way suitable to the glory and happiness of that state, and as much above the noblest and most delightful employments of this world, as the perfection of our bodies, and the powers of our souls, shall then be above what they are now in this world.

For there is no doubt but that he who made us, and endued our souls with a desire of immortality, and so large a capacity of happiness, does understand very well by what way and means to make us happy, and hath in readiness proper exercises and employments for that state, and every way more fitted to make us happy, than any condition or employment in this world is suitable to a temporal happiness; employments that are suitable to "the spirits of just men made perfect," united to bodies purified and refined almost to the condition of spirits; employments which we shall be so far from being weary of, that they shall minister to us a new and fresh delight to all eternity; and this, perhaps, not so much from the variety, as from the perpetual and growing pleasure of them.

It is sufficient for us to know this in the general,

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and to trust the infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness of God, for the particular manner and circumstances of our happiness: not doubting but that he, who is the eternal and inexhaustible spring and fountain of all happiness, can and will derive and convey such a share of it to every one of us as he thinks fit, and in such ways as he, who best understands it, is best able to find out.

In a word, the happiness of the next life shall be such as is worthy of the great King of the world to bestow upon his faithful servants, and such as is infinitely beyond the just reward of their best services; it is to see God, *i. e.* to contemplate and love the best and most perfect of beings, and "to be for ever with the Lord, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

I will say no more upon this argument, lest I should say less, and because whoever ventures to wade far into it will soon find himself out of his depth, and in danger to be swallowed up and lost in that great abyss, which is not to be fathomed by the shallow faculties of mortal men.

I shall therefore only mention the

2. Second thing I proposed to speak to; viz. the eternity of this happiness: "and the end everlasting life:" by which the apostle intends to express the utmost perfection, but not the final period, of the happiness of good men in another world. For to a perfect state of happiness these two conditions are requisite; that it be immutable, and that it be interminable, that it can neither admit of a change nor of an end. And this is all that I shall say of it, it being impossible to say any thing that is more intelligible and plain, concerning that which is infinite,



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than that it is so. I should now have proceeded to the

II. Second thing I proposed; viz. By what way and means we may be prepared, and made meet to be made partakers of this happiness; and that is (as I have told you all along) by the constant and sincere endeavour of a holy and good life; for the text supposeth that they only who are "made free from sin, and become the servants of God," and who "have their fruit unto holiness," are they whose end shall be everlasting life. But this is an argument which I have had so frequent occasion to speak to, that I shall not now meddle with it. All that I shall do more at present, shall be to make an inference or two from what hath been said upon this argument.

I. The consideration of the happy state of good men in another world, cannot but be a great comfort and support to good men under all the evils and sufferings of this present life. Hope is a great cordial to the minds of men, especially when the thing hoped for does so vastly outweigh the present grievance and trouble. The Holy Scriptures, which reveal to us the happiness of our future state, do likewise assure us that there is no comparison between the afflictions and sufferings of good men in this world, and the reward of them in the other. "I reckon, (saith St. Paul, Rom. viii. 18.) that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Particularly the consideration of that glorious change which shall be made in our bodies at the resurrection, ought to be a great comfort to us under all the pains and diseases which they are now liable to, and even against death itself. One of the great-

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est burthens of human nature, is the frailty and infirmity of our bodies, the necessities which they are frequently pressed withal, the diseases and pains to which they are liable, and the fear of death, by reason whereof a great part of mankind are subject to bondage; against all which this is an everlasting spring of consolation to us, that the time is coming when we shall have other sort of bodies, freed from that burthen of corruption which we now groan under, and from all those miseries and inconveniencies which flesh and blood are now subject to. For the time will come, when "these vile bodies," which we now wear, "shall be changed, and fashioned like to the glorious body of the Son of God;" and when they shall be raised at the last day, they shall not be raised such as we laid them down, vile and corruptible, but immortal and incorruptible: for the same power which hath raised them up to life, shall likewise change them, and put a glory upon them like to that of the glorified body of our Lord; and when this glorious change is made, "when this corruptible hath put on incorruption, and this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory;" and when this last enemy is perfectly subdued, we shall be set above all the frailties and dangers, all the temptations and sufferings of this mortal state; there will be then no fleshly lusts and brutish passions to war against the soul; no law in our members to rise up in rebellion against the law of our minds; no diseases to torment us, no danger of death to terrify us; all the motions and passions of our outward man shall then be perfectly subject to the reason of our minds, and our bodies shall partake of the immortality of our souls.



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How should this consideration bear us up under all the evils of life and the fears of death, that the resurrection will be a perfect cure of all our infirmities and diseases, and an effectual remedy of all the evils that we now labour under; and that it is but a very little while that we shall be troubled with these frail, and mortal, and vile bodies, which shall shortly be laid in the dust, and when they are raised again, shall become spiritual, incorruptible, and glorious.

And if our bodies shall undergo so happy a change, what happiness may we imagine shall then be conferred upon our souls, that so much better and nobler part of ourselves! as the apostle reasons in another case, "Doth God take care of oxen?" Hath he this consideration of our bodies, which are but the brutish part of the man? what regard will he then have to his own image, that spark of divinity which is for ever to reside in these bodies? If, upon the account of our souls, and for their sakes, our bodies shall become incorruptible, spiritual, and glorious, then certainly our souls shall be endued with far more excellent and Divine qualities: if our bodies shall, in some degree, partake of the perfection of our souls in their spiritual and immortal nature, to what a pitch of perfection shall our souls be raised and advanced! even to an equality with angels, and to some kind of participation of the Divine nature and perfection, so far as a creature is capable of them.

II. The comparison which is here in the text, and which I have largely explained, between the manifest inconveniences of a sinful and vicious course, and the manifold advantages of a holy and virtuous life, is a plain direction to us which of these

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two to choose. So that I may make the same appeal that Moses does, after that he had at large declared the blessings promised to the obedience of God's laws, and the curse denounced against the violation and transgression of them: (Deut. xxx. 19.) "I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life," that you may be happy in life and death, and after death to all eternity. I know every one is ready to choose happiness, and to say with Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his:" but if we do in good earnest desire the end, we must take the way that leads to it; we must "become the servants of God," and "have our fruit unto holiness," if ever we expect that "the end shall be everlasting life."

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# SERMON CLXVI.

## THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF HOLY RESOLUTION.

*Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*—JOB XXXIV. 31, 32.

THESE words are the words of Elihu, one of Job's friends, and the only one who is not reproved for his discourse with Job, and who was, probably, the author of this ancient and most eloquent history of the sufferings and patience of Job, and of the end which the Lord made with him; and they contain in them a description of the temper and behaviour of a true penitent. "Surely it is meet," &c.

In which words we have the two essential parts of a true repentance.

First, A humble acknowledgment and confession of our sins to God; "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement."

Secondly, A firm purpose and resolution of amendment and forsaking of sin for the future; "I will not offend any more: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

First, A humble acknowledgment and confession of our sins to God: "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement;" that is, have sinned and been justly punished for it, and am now convinced of the evil of sin, and resolved to

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leave it; "I have borne chastisement, I will offend no more."

Of this first part of repentance, viz. a humble confession of our sins to God, with great shame and sorrow for them, and a thorough conviction of the evil and danger of a sinful course, I have already treated at large. In these repentance must begin, but it must not end in them: for a penitent confession of our sins to God, and a conviction of the evil of them, signifies nothing, unless it brings us to a resolution of amendment; that is, of leaving our sins, and betaking ourselves to a better course. And this I intend, by God's assistance, to speak to now, as being the

Second part of a true repentance here described in the text; viz. a firm purpose and resolution of amendment, and forsaking of sin for the future; and to express it the more strongly and emphatically, and to shew the firmness of the resolution, it is repeated again, "I will not offend any more;" and then in the next verse, "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." And this is so necessary a part of repentance, that herein the very essence and formal nature of repentance does consist; viz. in the firm and sincere purpose and resolution of a better course.

In the handling of this argument, I shall do these six things:

I. I shall shew what resolution is in general.

II. What is the special object of this kind of resolution.

III. What is implied in a sincere resolution of leaving our sins, and returning to God.

IV. I shall shew that in this resolution of amendment, the very essence and formal nature of repentance does consist.

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V. I shall offer some considerations to convince men both of the necessity and fitness of this resolution, and of keeping steadfastly to it. "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more."

VI. I shall add some brief directions concerning the managing and maintaining of this holy and necessary resolution.

I. What resolution in general is. It is a fixed determination of the will about any thing, either to do it, or not to do it, as upon due deliberation we have judged and concluded it to be necessary or convenient to be done, or not to be done by us: and this supposeth three things.

1. Resolution supposeth a precedent deliberation of the mind about the thing to be resolved upon. For no prudent man does determine or resolve upon any thing till he hath considered the thing, and weighed it well with himself, and hath fully debated the necessity and expedience of it; what advantage he shall have by the doing of it, and what danger and inconvenience will certainly, or very probably, redound to him by the neglect and omission of it. For peremptorily to determine and resolve upon any thing before a man hath done this, is not properly resolution, but precipitancy and rashness.

2. Resolution supposeth some judgment passed upon the thing, after a man hath thus deliberated about it: that he is satisfied in his mind one way or other concerning it, that his understanding is convinced either that it is necessary and convenient for him to do it, or that it is not; and this is sometimes called resolution, but is not that resolution which immediately determines a man to action. This judgment of the necessity and fitness of the thing, is not

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the resolution of the will, but of the understanding: for it does not signify that a man hath fully determined to do the thing, but that he hath determined with himself that it is reasonable to be done, and that he is no longer in doubt and suspense whether it be best for him to do it or not, but is in his mind resolved and satisfied one way or other. And these are two very different things; to be resolved in one's judgment, that is, to be convinced that a thing is fit and necessary to be done, and to be resolved to set upon the doing of it; for many men are thus convinced of the fitness and necessity of the thing, who yet have not the heart, cannot bring themselves to a firm and fixed resolution to set upon the doing of it. So that an act of the judgment must go before the resolution of the will: for as he is rash that resolves to do a thing before he hath deliberated about it; so he is blind and wilful that resolves to do a thing before his judgment be satisfied, whether it be best for him to do it or not.

3. If the matter be of considerable moment and consequence, resolution supposeth some motion of the affections; which is a kind of bias upon the will, a certain propension and inclination that a man feels in himself, either urging him to do a thing, or withdrawing him from it. Deliberation and judgment, they direct a man what to do, or leave undone; the affections excite and quicken a man to take some resolution in the matter; that is, to do suitably to the judgment his mind hath passed upon the thing. For instance; a great sinner reflects upon his life, and considers what he hath done, what the course is that he lives in, and what the issue and consequence of it will probably or certainly be, whether it will make him happy or miserable in the

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conclusion; and debating the matter calmly and soberly with himself, he is satisfied and convinced of the evil and danger of a wicked life, and consequently that it is best for him to resolve upon a better course; that is, to repent. Now these thoughts must needs awaken in him fearful apprehensions of the wrath of Almighty God, which is due to him for his sins, and hangs over him, and which he is every moment in danger of, if he goes on in his evil course. These thoughts are apt, likewise, to fill him with shame and confusion, at the remembrance of his horrible ingratitude to God his maker, his best friend and greatest benefactor, and of his desperate folly in provoking omnipotent justice against himself; whereupon he is heartily grieved and troubled for what he hath done; and these affections of fear, and shame, and sorrow, being once up, they come with great violence upon the will, and urge the man to a speedy resolution of changing his course, and leaving the way he is in, which he is fully convinced is so evil and dangerous; and of betaking himself to another course, which he is fully satisfied will be much more for his safety and advantage.

So that resolution, in general, is a fixed determination of the will; that is, such a determination as is not only for the present free from all wavering and doubting, but such as cannot prudently be altered, so long as reason remains. For the man who, upon full deliberation and conviction of his mind, resolves upon any thing, cannot without the imputation of fickleness and inconstancy quit that resolution, so long as he hath the same reason which he had when he took it up, and is still satisfied that the reason is good. For instance; the man who hath taken up a resolution to be sober, because of the ugliness

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and unreasonableness of drunkenness, and the temporal inconveniencies, and eternal damnation, which that sin exposeth a man to; if these reasons be true and good, can never prudently alter the resolution which he hath taken, and return to that sin again.

II. Let us consider what is the special object or matter of this resolution, wherein the formal nature of repentance does consist, what it is that a man when he repents resolves upon; and that I told you is to leave his sin, and to return to God and his duty; and this is the resolution which the penitent here described in the text takes up, "I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." He resolves against all known sin, "I will not offend any more;" and if through ignorance he had sinned, and done contrary to his duty, he desires to be better instructed, that he may not offend again in the like kind. "That which I see not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

So that the true penitent resolves upon these two things:

1. To forsake his sin. And,

2. To return to God and his duty.

1. To forsake his sin: and this implies the quitting of his sinful course whatever it had been; and that not only by abstaining from the outward act and practice of every sin, but by endeavouring to crucify and subdue the inward affection and inclination to it.

And it implies farther, the utter forsaking of sin; for repentance is not only a resolution to abstain from sin for the present, but never to return to it again. Thus Ephraim, when he repented of his

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idolatry, he utterly renounced it, saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos. xiv. 8.) He that truly repents, is resolved to break off his sinful course, and to abandon those lusts and vices which he was formerly addicted to, and lived in.

2. The true penitent resolves likewise to return to God and his duty; he does not stay in the negative part of religion, he does not only resolve not to commit any sin, but not to neglect or omit any thing that he knows to be his duty; and if he has been ignorant of any part of his duty, he is willing to know it, that he may do it; he is not only determined to forsake his sin, which will make him miserable, but to return to God, who alone can make him happy: he is now resolved to love God, and to serve him as much as he hated and dishonoured him before; and will now be as diligent to perform and practise all the duties and parts of religion, as he was negligent of them before, and as ready to do all the good he can to all men in any kind, as he was careless of these things before: these, in general, are the things which a true penitent resolves upon. I proceed to the

III. Third thing I proposed to consider; namely, what is implied in a sincere resolution of leaving our sins, and returning to God and our duty. And this holy resolution, if it be thorough and sincere, does imply in it these three things:

1. That it be universal.

2. That it be a resolution of the means as well as of the end.

3. That it presently comes to effect, and be speedily and without delay put in execution.

1. A sincere resolution of amendment must be universal: a resolution to forsake all sin, and to re-

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turn to our whole duty, and every part of it; such a resolution as that of holy David, "to hate every false way, and to have respect to all God's commandments."

This resolution must be universal, in respect of the whole man; and with regard to all our actions. In respect of the whole man; for we must resolve not only to abstain from the outward action of sin, but this resolution must have its effect upon our inward man, and reach our very hearts and thoughts; it must restrain our inclinations, and "mortify our lusts and corrupt affections," and "renew us in the very spirit of our minds," as the apostle expresses it.

And it must be universal, in respect of all our actions. For this is not the resolution of a sincere penitent, to abstain only from gross and notorious, from scandalous and open sins; but, likewise, to refrain from the commission of those sins which are small in the esteem of men, and not branded with a mark of public infamy and reproach; to forbear sin in secret, and when no eye of man sees us and takes notice of us. This is not a sincere resolution, to resolve to practise the duties and virtues of religion in public, and to neglect them in private; to resolve to perform the duties of the first table, and to pass by those of the second; to resolve to serve God, and to take a liberty to defraud and cozen men; to honour our Father which is in heaven, and to injure and hate our brethren upon earth; "to love our neighbour, and to hate our enemy," as the Jews did of old time; to resolve against swearing, and to allow ourselves the liberty to speak falsely, and to break our word; to flee from superstition, and to run into faction; "to abhor idols, and to commit sacrilege;" to resolve to be devout at church, and

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deceitful in our shops; to be very scrupulous about lesser matters, and to be very zealous about indifferent things; "to tithe mint, and anise, and cummin, and to omit the weightier matters of the law, mercy, and fidelity, and justice;" to be very rigid in matters of faith and opinion, but loose in life and practice.

No; the resolution of a sincere penitent must be universal and uniform; it must extend alike to the forbearing of all sin, and the exercise of every grace and virtue, and to the due practice and performance of every part of our duty. The true penitent must resolve for the future to abstain from all sin, "to be holy in all manner of conversation, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which, by Jesus Christ, are to the praise and glory of God." For, if a man do truly repent of his wicked life, there is the very same reason why he should resolve against all sin, as why he should resolve against any; why he should observe all the commandments of God, as why he should keep any one of them. For, as St. James reasons concerning him that wilfully breaks any one commandment of God, that "he is guilty of all, and breaks the whole law;" because the authority of God is equally stamped upon all his laws, and is violated and contemned by the wilful transgression of any one of them; "For he that hath said, Thou shalt not kill, hath likewise said, Thou shalt not commit adultery, and, Thou shalt not steal:" so he that resolves against any one sin, or upon performance of any one part of his duty, ought for the very same reason to make his resolution universal; because one sin is evil and provoking to God, as well as another, and the performance of one part of our duty good and pleasing

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to him, as well as another, and there is no difference. So that he that resolves against any sin, upon wise and reasonable grounds, because of the evil of it, and the danger of the wrath of God to which it exposeth us, ought for the same reason to resolve against all sin; because it is damnable to commit adultery, and to steal, as well as to kill; and that resolution against sin, which is not universal, it is a plain case that it is not true and sincere, and that it was not taken up out of the sense of the intrinsical evil of sin, and the danger of it in respect of God and the judgment of another world (for this reason holds against every sin, and remains always the same), but that it was taken up upon some inferior consideration, either because of the shame and infamy of it among men, or because of some other temporal inconvenience, which if the man could be secured against, he would presently break his resolution, and return to the commission of that sin with as much freedom as any other.

2. A sincere resolution implies a resolution of the means as well as of the end. He that is truly and honestly resolved against any sin, is likewise resolved to avoid, as much as is possible, the occasions and temptations which may lead or draw him to that sin; or if they happen to present themselves to him, he is resolved to stand upon his guard, and to resist them. In like manner, he that sincerely resolves upon doing his duty in any kind, must resolve upon the means that are requisite and necessary to the due discharge and performance of that duty. As he that resolves against that needless and useless sin of swearing in common conversation, must resolve also "to set a guard before the door

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of his lips," seeing it is certain that it requires great care and attention, at least for some competent time, to get rid of a habit.

When David resolved not to offend with his tongue, he resolved at the same time to be very watchful over himself; (Psal. xxxix. 1.) "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth as with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." For a man to resolve against any sin or vice, and yet to involve himself continually in the occasions, and to run himself into the company and temptations which do naturally, and will almost necessarily, lead and betray him into those sins, is a plain evidence of insincerity. This I take for a certain rule; that whatever can reasonably move a man to resolve upon any end, will, if his resolution be sincere and honest, determine him every whit as strongly to use all those means which are necessary in order to that end. But of this I have spoken elsewhere.

3. A sincere resolution of leaving our sins, and returning to God and our duty, does imply the present time, and that we are to resolve speedily and without delay to put this resolution in practice; that we are peremptorily determined not to go one step farther in the ways of sin, not to neglect any duty that God requires of us not for one moment; but immediately and forthwith to set upon the practice of it, so soon as occasion and opportunity is offered to us. And the reason of this is evident; because the very same considerations that prevail upon any man to take up this resolution of amendment, and changing the course of his life, are every whit as prevalent to engage him to put this resolution presently in practice and execution. . . .

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I deny not, but a man may resolve upon a thing for the future, and when the time comes may execute his resolution, and this resolution may for all that be very sincere and real, though it was delayed to a certain time, because he did not see reason to resolve to do the thing sooner: but it cannot be so in this case of repentance; because there can no good reason be imagined, why a man should resolve seven years hence to change his course, and break off his sinful life, but the very same reason will hold as strongly, why he should do it presently and without delay; and over and besides this, there are a great many and powerful reasons and considerations why he should rather put this good resolution in present execution, than put it off and defer it to any farther time whatsoever.

What is it that puts thee upon this resolution of leaving thy sins, and urgeth thee to do it at all? Art thou resolved to leave sin because it is so great an evil? Why, it is so for the present; the evil of it is intrinsical to it, and cleaves to the very nature of it, and is never to be separated from it; so that this is a present reason, and as strong against it now, as ever it will be hereafter: nay, it is stronger at present; because, if it be so great an evil, the sooner we leave it the better.

Or dost thou resolve to forsake sin, because thou art apprehensive of the danger and mischief of it, that it will expose thee to the wrath of God, and to the endless and intolerable misery of another world? Why this reason likewise makes much more for the present leaving of it; because the longer thou continuest in a sinful and impenitent state, the greater is thy danger, and the greater penalty thou wilt



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most certainly incur; by delaying to put this good resolution in practice, thou dost increase and multiply the causes of thy fear. For hereby thou provokest God more, and every day dost incense his wrath more and more against thee; thou preparest more and more fuel for everlasting burnings, and treasurest up for thyself more wrath, "against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Nay, thou dost not only increase and aggravate, but thou dost hereby hasten thine own misery and ruin, and takest the most effectual course that is possible, to bring thine own fears and the vengeance of Almighty God so much the sooner upon thee. For nothing provokes God to take a speedier course with sinners, and does more quicken the pace of his judgments, than wilful continuance in sin.

And yet farther: if thy resolution be valuable and considerable to thee, thou takest the most effectual course in the world to frustrate and defeat it. Thou art fully resolved to leave thy sins hereafter, and thou thinkest thou hast reason for it: but by continuing in them for the present, thou provokest the justice of Almighty God to cut thee off before thy resolution has taken effect.

Again: dost thou resolve to leave thy sins one time or other, because thereby thou hopest to put thyself into a capacity of pardon and mercy, and of eternal life and happiness? Why this reason should move thee to do the thing as soon as is possible, because the sooner thou forsakest thy sins, thou hast the greater hope of finding mercy and forgiveness with God; and the sooner thou beginnest a holy course, and the longer thou continuest therein, thou hast reason to expect a greater and more ample re-

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ward. Thou canst not, by holding off, hope to bring down pardon and mercy to lower rates, and to obtain these hereafter upon easier terms. No: the terms and conditions of God's mercy are already fixed and established, so as never to be altered.

So that whatever reason thou canst possibly allege for taking up this resolution, it is every whit as forcible and powerful to persuade thee to put it speedily in execution.

And then there is this reason besides, and that a very considerable one, why thou shouldest immediately put this resolution in practice, and not delay it for a moment. Thou mayest at present do it much more certainly, and much more easily. Much more certainly, because thou art surer of the present time than thou canst be of the future. The present is in thy power, but not one moment more. And thou mayest at present do it more easily; for the longer thou continuest in sin, thy resolution against it will still grow weaker, and the habit of sin continually stronger. Thou wilt every day be more enslaved by the power of thy lusts, and thy heart will every day be more hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. All the change that time makes will still be for the worse, and more to thy disadvantage. Sin will be as pleasant to thee hereafter, and thou more loath to leave it, than at present. Sin was never mortified by age. It will every day have more strength to bind thee and hold thee fast, and thou wilt have every day less to break loose from it. For by every sin thou dost commit, thou addest a new degree to the strength and force of it; and so much strength as thou addest to it, so much thou takest from thyself, and so much thou losest of thine own power and liberty. For a man and his lusts are like



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nature and a disease; so much strength as the disease gains, nature loseth, and the man is hereby doubly weakened, for he doth not only lose so much of his own strength, but the enemy gets it.

Nay, thou dost hereby likewise forfeit that auxiliary strength and assistance which the grace of God is ready to afford to men, his restraining and his preventing grace. For as a man goes on in sin, and advanceth in an evil course, the grace of God draws off by degrees, and his Holy Spirit doth insensibly leave him; and when a sinner is come to this, his best resolutions will "vanish like the morning cloud, and the early dew which passeth away."

So that it cannot be a true and sincere resolution of leaving our sins, if it do not take place, and have not its effect, presently. For there is no man that takes up a resolution, upon weighty and considerable reasons, of doing any thing, but, if the reasons upon which he takes it up urge him to do the thing at present, he will presently set about it; and that man is not resolved to do a thing, whatever he may pretend, who hath most reason to it at present, and may best do it now, and yet delays it.

And thus I have opened to you the nature of this holy resolution of leaving our sins, and returning to God and our duty, and have shewn what is necessarily implied in such a resolution, if it be sincere and in good earnest; that it be universal; and that it be a resolution of the means as well as of the end; and that it presently take place and be put in execution. And these are three of the best signs and marks that I know of, whereby a man may try and examine the truth and sincerity of that resolution of amendment which we call repentance. If it be against all sin,

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and have an equal regard to every part of our duty; if, when we resolve upon the end, that is, to avoid sin, and to perform our duty, we are equally resolved upon the means that are necessary to those ends; if the resolution we have taken up commence presently, and from that day forward be duly executed and put in practice; then is our repentance and resolution of amendment sincere: but if there be a defect in any of these, our resolution is not as it ought to be.

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# SERMON CLXVII.

## THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF HOLY RESOLUTION.

*Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*—JOB XXXIV. 31, 32.

THESE words are the description of the temper and behaviour of a true penitent, and do contain in them the two essential parts of a true repentance.

First, A humble acknowledgment and confession of sin.

Secondly, A firm purpose and resolution of amendment, and forsaking our sins for the future.

And this latter is so necessary a part of repentance, that herein the very essence and formal nature of repentance does consist. In handling of this argument, I proposed to consider,

I. What resolution in general is.

II. What is the special object or matter of this kind of resolution.

III. What is implied in a sincere resolution of leaving our sins, and returning to God and our duty.

IV. To shew that, in this resolution of amendment, the very essence and formal nature of repentance doth consist.

V. To offer some considerations to convince men of the necessity and fitness of this resolution, and of keeping steadfast to it.

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VI. To add some directions concerning the managing and maintaining this holy resolution. The three first I have spoken to; I now proceed to the

IV. Fourth, To shew that in this resolution the very essence and formal nature of repentance doth consist. A man may do many reasonable actions without an explicit resolution. In things that are more easy and natural to us, judgment and resolution are all one; it is all one to judge a thing fit to be done, and to resolve to do it. But in matters of difficulty, when a man is to strive against the stream, and to oppose strong habits that have taken deep root, there is nothing to be done without an explicit resolution. No man makes any remarkable change in his life, so as to cross his inclinations and custom, without an express resolution. For though a man's judgment be never so much convinced of the reasonableness and necessity of such a change; yet, unless a man's spirit be fortified and fixed by resolution, the power of custom, and the violence of his own inclinations, will carry him against his judgment. Now there is no change of a man's life can be imagined, wherein a man offers greater violence to inveterate habits, and to the strong propensions of his present temper, than in this of repentance. So that among all the actions of a man's life, there is none that doth more necessarily require an express purpose than repentance does.

And that herein repentance doth chiefly consist, I shall endeavour to make evident from Scripture, and from the common apprehensions of mankind concerning repentance.

The Scripture, besides the several descriptions of repentance, useth two words to express it to us, μεταμέλεια and μετάνοια. The former properly signifies

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the inward trouble and displeasure which men conceive against themselves for having done amiss; which if it be κατὰ Θεὸν λύπη, "a godly sorrow," it worketh in us μετάνοιαν ἀμεταμέλητον, as St. Paul calls it, "a repentance not to be repented of;" that is, such a change of our minds, which as we shall have no cause to be troubled at, so no reason to alter afterwards. And what is this but a firm, steadfast, and unalterable resolution?

The Scripture likewise useth several phrases of the like importance to describe repentance by; as, forsaking and turning from sin, and conversion and turning to God. Forsaking and turning from sin: hence it is called, "Repentance from dead works," (Heb. vi. 1.) and turning to God, (Acts xxvi. 20.) "I have shewed to the gentiles that they shall repent and turn to God;" that is, from the worship of idols to the true God. And we have both these together in the description which the prophet gives of repentance: (Isa. lv. 7.) "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." Now this change begins in the sinner's resolution of doing this; and the unrighteous man's forsaking his thoughts, is nothing else but changing the purpose of his mind, and resolving upon a better course. And thus Lactantius describes it: *Agere autem paenitentiam nihil aliud est, quam affirmare et profiteri se non amplius peccaturum:* "To repent, is nothing else but for a man to declare and profess that he will sin no more." This is repentance before men. And repentance before God is a resolution answerable to this profession. And elsewhere, saith the same author, "The Greeks do most fully express repentance by the word μετάνοια, because he that repents

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recovers his mind from his former folly, and is troubled at it:" *et confirmat animam suam ad rectius vivendum*, "and confirms his mind for a better course." And how is this done but by a resolution?

And that this is the natural and true notion of repentance, appears, in that the heathens did consent and agree in it. Gellius gives this description of it: *Pœnitere tum dicere solemus, cum quæ ipsi fecimus, ea nobis post incipiunt displicere, sententiamque in iis nostram demutamus:* "We are said then to repent, when those things which we have done begin afterwards to displease us, and we change our resolution about them." And so, likewise, one of the philosophers describes it: "Repentance is the beginning of philosophy, a flying from foolish words and actions, καὶ τῆς ἀμεταμελήτου ζωῆς ἡ πρώτη παρασκευή, and the first preparation of a life not to be repented of."

It is true, indeed, repentance supposeth the entire change of our lives and actions, and a continued state, as the proper consequence of it: but repentance is but the beginning of this change, which takes its rise from the purpose and resolution of our minds; and if it be sincere and firm, it will certainly have this effect, to change our lives; and if it be not so, it is not repentance. For though in the nature of the thing it be possible that a man may sincerely resolve upon a thing, and yet let fall his resolution afterwards, before it come into act; yet, in the phrase of Scripture, nothing is called repentance but such a resolution as takes effect, so soon as there is opportunity for it. If we change our resolution, and repent of our repentance, this is not that which St. Paul calls "Repentance unto salvation." So that no man that reads and consi-

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ders the Bible, can impose upon himself so grossly, as to conceit himself a true penitent, and, consequently, to be in a state of salvation, who hath been troubled for his sins, and hath taken up a resolution to leave them, if he do not pursue this resolution, and act according to it.

V. I shall, in the next place, propound some arguments and considerations to persuade men to this holy resolution, and then to keep them firm and steadfast to it, so as never to change it after they have once taken it up.

First, I shall propound some arguments to persuade men to take up this resolution; and they are these:

1. Consider that this resolution of repentance is nothing but what, under the influence of God's grace and Holy Spirit, which are never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, is in your power. And it is necessary to premise this; for unless this be cleared, all the other arguments that I can use will signify nothing. For nothing in the world could be more vain, than to take a great deal of pains to persuade men to do a thing which they cannot do, to entreat them to attempt an impossibility, and to urge and solicit them with all earnestness and importunity to do that which is absolutely and altogether out of their power. All the commands of God, and the exhortations of his word, and all the promises and threatenings whereby these commands and exhortations are enforced, do plainly suppose, either that it is in our power to do the thing which God commands or exhorts us to; or else, if it be not (which I grant it is not), that God is ready by his grace and strength, if we be not wanting to ourselves, to assist and enable us to

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those ends and purposes. For the gospel supposeth a power going along with it, and that the Holy Spirit of God works upon the minds of men, to quicken, and excite, and assist them to their duty. And if it were not so, the exhortations of preachers would be nothing else but a cruel and bitter mocking of sinners, and an ironical insulting over the misery and weakness of poor creatures; and for ministers to preach, or people to hear sermons, upon other terms, would be the vainest expense of time, and the idlest thing we do all the week; and all our dissuasives from sin, and exhortations to holiness and a good life, and vehement persuasions of men to strive to get to heaven, and to escape hell, would be just as if one should urge a blind man, by many reasons and arguments, taken from the advantages of sight, and the comfort of that sense, and the beauty of external objects, by all means to open his eyes, and to behold the delights of nature, to see his way, and to look to his steps, and should upbraid him, and be very angry with him, for not doing so. Why, if resolution be absolutely impossible to us, and a thing wholly out of our power, it is just the same case. But then we ought to deal plainly and openly with men, and to tell them, that what we so earnestly persuade them to is that which we certainly know they cannot do. So that it is necessary, if I intend that the following considerations should do any good, to assure men that it is not impossible for them to make a resolution of leaving their sins and returning to God.

It is a power which every man is naturally invested withal, to consider, and judge, and choose. To consider, that is, to weigh and compare things together; to judge, that is, to determine which is

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best; and to choose, that is, to resolve to do it or not: and there is nothing more evident and more universally acknowledged in temporal cases, and in the affairs and concernments of this life. In these matters resolution is a thing ordinary and of frequent practice; it is the principle of all great and considerable actions. Men resolve to be great in this world, and by virtue of this resolution, when they have once taken it up, what industry will they not use! what hazards will they not run in the pursuit of their ambitious designs! Difficulties and dangers do rather whet their courage, and set an edge upon their spirits. Men resolve to be rich; the apostle speaks of some that will be rich: (1 Tim. vi.) "They that will be rich:" and though this be but a low and mean design, yet these persons, by virtue of this resolution, will toil and take prodigious pains in it.

And as to spiritual things, every man hath the same power radically; that is, he hath the faculties of understanding and will, but these are obstructed and hindered in their exercise, and strongly biassed a contrary way by the power of evil inclinations and habits; so that, as to the exercise of this power, and the effect of it in spiritual things, men are in a sort as much disabled as if they were destitute of it. For it is, in effect, all one, to have no understanding at all to consider things that are spiritual, as to have the understanding blinded by an invincible prejudice; to have no liberty as to spiritual things, as to have the will strongly biassed against them. For a man that hath this prejudice upon his understanding, and this bias upon his will is, to all intents and purposes, as if he were destitute of these faculties. But then we are not to understand this

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impotency to be absolutely natural, but accidental; not to be in the first frame and constitution of our souls, but to have happened upon the depravation of nature. It is not a want of natural faculties, but the binding of them up and hindering their operations to certain purposes. This impotency proceeds from the power of evil habits. And thus the Scripture expresseth it, and compares an impotency arising from bad habits and customs to a natural impossibility; nothing coming nearer to nature, than a powerful custom. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also, that are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well."

But now God by the gospel hath designed the recovery of mankind from the slavery of sin, and the power of their lusts; and therefore, as, by the death of Christ, he hath provided a way to remove the guilt of sin, so, by the Spirit of Christ, he furnisheth us with sufficient power to destroy the dominion of sin. I say sufficient, if we be not wanting to ourselves, but be "workers together with God," and be as diligent "to work out our own salvation," as he is ready "to work in us both to will and to do."

So that, when we persuade men to repent and change their lives, and to resolve upon a better course, we do not exhort them to any thing that is absolutely out of their power, but to what they may do; though not of themselves, yet by the grace of God, which is always ready to assist them, unless, by their former gross neglects and long obstinacy in an evil course, they have provoked God to withdraw his grace from them. So that though, considering our own strength abstractedly, and separately from

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the grace of God, these things be not in our power; yet the grace of God puts them into our power.

And this is so far from derogating from the grace of God, that it is highly to the praise of it. For if the grace of God makes us able to repent and resolve upon a new life, he that asserts this does not attribute his repentance to himself, but to the grace of God: nay, he that says that God's grace excites and is ready to assist men to do what God commands, represents God immensely more good and gracious, than he that says that God commands men to do that which by their natural power they cannot do, and will condemn them for not doing it, and yet denies them that grace which is necessary to the doing of it.

Let this then be established as a necessary consideration to prevent discouragement, that to resolve upon the change of our lives, is that which, by the grace of God, we are enabled to do, if we will. Resolution is no strange and extraordinary thing; it is one of the most common acts that belongs to us as we are men; but we do not ordinarily apply it to the best purposes. It is not so ordinary for men to resolve to be good, as to be rich and great; not so common for men to resolve against sin, as to resolve against poverty and suffering. It is not so usual for men to resolve to keep a good conscience, as to keep a good place. Indeed, our corrupt nature is much more opposite to this holy kind of resolution. But then to balance and answer this, God hath promised greater and more immediate assistance to us in this case than in any other. There is a general blessing and common assistance promised to resolution and diligence about temporal things; and God's providence doth often advance such persons to

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riches and honour. "The diligent hand, with God's blessing, makes rich;" as Solomon tells us, (Prov. x. 4.) and, (xxii. 29.) "Seest thou (says he) a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men!" Now diligence is the effect of a great and vigorous resolution. But there is a special and extraordinary blessing and assistance that attends the resolution and endeavour of a holy life. God hath not promised to strengthen men with all might in the way to riches and honours, and to assist the ambitious and covetous designers of this world with "a mighty and glorious power, such as raised up Jesus from the dead:" but this he hath promised to those, who with a firm purpose and resolution do engage in the ways of religion. Let us then shake off our sloth and listlessness, and in that strength and assistance which God offers, let us resolve to leave our sins, and to amend our lives.

2. Consider what it is that you are to resolve upon; to leave your sins and to return to God and goodness. So that the things I am persuading you to resolve upon, are the strongest reasons that can be for such a resolution. Sin is such a thing, that there can be no better argument to make men resolve against it than to consider what it is, and to think seriously of the nature and consequence of it. And God and goodness are so amiable and desirable, that the very proposal of these objects, hath invitations and allurements enough to inflame our desires after them, and to make us rush into the embraces of them. If we would but enter into the serious consideration of them, we should soon be resolved in our minds about them.

Do but consider a little what sin is. It is the

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shame and blemish of thy nature, the reproach and disgrace of thy understanding and reason, the great deformity and disease of thy soul, and the eternal enemy of thy rest and peace. It is thy shackles and thy fetters, the tyrant that oppresses thee and restrains thee of thy liberty, and condemns thee to the basest slavery and the vilest drudgery. It is the unnatural and violent state of thy soul, the worm that perpetually gnaws thy conscience, the cause of all thy fears and troubles, and of all the evils and miseries, all the mischief and disorders that are in the world; it is the foundation and fuel of hell; it is that which puts thee out of the possession and enjoyment of thyself, which doth alienate and separate thee from God, the fountain of bliss and happiness, which provokes him to be thine enemy, and lays thee open every moment to the fierce revenge of his justice; and if thou dost persist and continue in it, will finally sink and oppress thee under the insupportable weight of his wrath, and make thee so weary of thyself, that thou shalt wish a thousand times that thou hadst never been; and will render thee so perfectly miserable, that thou wouldest esteem it a great happiness to change thy condition with the most wretched and forlorn person that ever lived upon earth, to be perpetually upon a rack, and to lie down for ever under the rage of all the most violent diseases and pains that ever afflicted mankind. Sin is all this which I have described, and will certainly bring upon thee all those evils and mischiefs which I have mentioned, and make thee far more miserable than I am able to express, or thou to conceive. And art thou not yet resolved to leave it? Shall I need to use any other arguments to set thee against it, and take thee off from the love and practice of it,

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than this representation which I have now made of the horrible nature and consequences of it?

And then consider, on the other hand, what it is that I am persuading thee to turn to; to thy God and duty. And would not this be a blessed change indeed! to leave the greatest evil, and to turn to the chief good! For this resolution of returning to God, is nothing else but a resolution to be wise and happy, and to put thyself into the possession of that which is a greater good, if it is possible, than sin is an evil, and will render thee more happy than sin can make thee miserable. Didst thou but think what God is, and what he will be to thee if thou wilt return to him, how kindly he will receive thee after all thy wanderings from him "days without number," thou wouldest soon take up the resolution of the prodigal, and say, "I will arise, and go to my father!"

And consider, likewise, what it is to return to thy duty. It is nothing else but to do what becomes thee, and what is suitable to the original fame of thy nature, and to the truest dictates of thy reason and conscience, and what is not more thy duty, than it is thy interest and thy happiness. For that which God requires of us is, to be righteous and holy, and good; that is, to be like God himself, who is the pattern of all perfection and happiness. It is to have our lives conformed to his will, which is always perfect holiness and goodness, a state of peace and tranquillity, and the very temper and disposition of happiness. It is that which is a principal and most essential ingredient into the felicity of the Divine nature, and without which God would not be what he is, but a deformed, and imperfect, and miserable being.



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And if this be a true representation which I have made to you, of sin and vice on the one hand, and of God and goodness on the other, what can be more powerful than the serious consideration of it, to engage us to a speedy resolution of leaving our sins, and of turning and "cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart?" After this we cannot but conclude with the penitent in the text; "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me;" and "if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

3. Consider how unreasonable it is to be unresolved in a case of so great moment and concernment. There is no greater argument of a man's weakness, than irresolution in matters of mighty consequence, when both the importance of the thing, and exigency of present circumstances, require a speedy resolution. We should account it a strange folly, for a man to be unresolved in the clearest and plainest matters that concern his temporal welfare and safety. If a man could not determine himself whether he should eat or starve; if he were dangerously sick, and could not determine whether he should take physic or die; or if one that were in prison, could not resolve himself whether he should accept of liberty, and be content to be released; or if a fair estate were offered to him, he should desire seven years' time to consider whether he should take it or not: this would be so absurd in the common affairs of life, that a man would be thought infatuated, that should be doubtful and unresolved in cases so plain, and of such pressing concernment. If a man were under the sentence and condemnation of the law, and liable tobe executed upon the least intimation of the prince's pleasure,

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and a pardon were graciously offered to him, with this intimation, that this would probably be the last offer of mercy that ever would be made to him; one would think that in this case a man should soon be determined what to do, or rather that he should not need to deliberate at all about it; because there is no danger of rashness in making haste to save his life.

And yet the case of a sinner is of far greater importance, and much more depends upon it, infinitely more than any temporal concernment whatsoever can amount to, even our happiness or misery to all eternity. And can there be any difficulty for a man to be resolved what is to be done in such a case? No case surely in the world can be plainer than this; whether a man should leave his sins, and return to God and his duty, or not; that is, whether a man should choose to be happy or miserable, unspeakably and everlastingly happy, or extremely and eternally miserable.

And the circumstances and exigencies of our case do call for a speedy and peremptory resolution in this matter. The sentence of the law is already passed, and God may execute it upon thee every moment; and it is great mercy and forbearance not to do it. Thy life is uncertain, and thou art liable every minute to be snatched away and hurried out of this world. However, at the best, thou hast but a little time to resolve in; death, and judgment, and eternity cannot be far off, and, for aught thou knowest, they may be even at the door. Thou art upon the matter just ready to be seized upon by death, to be summoned to judgment, and to be swallowed up of eternity: and is it not yet time thinkest thou to resolve? Wouldest thou have yet a little longer



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time to deliberate, whether thou shouldest repent and forsake thy sins, or not? If there were difficulty in the case, or if there were no danger in the delay; if thou couldest gain time, or any thing else, by suspending thy resolution, there were then some reason why thou shouldest not make a sudden determination. But thou canst pretend none of these. It is evident, at first sight, what is best to be done, and nothing can make it plainer. It is not a matter so clear and out of the controversy, that riches are better than poverty, and ease better than pain, and life more desirable than death, as it is, that it is better to break off our sins, than to continue in the practice of them; to be reconciled to God, than to go on to provoke him; to be holy and virtuous, than to be wicked and vicious; to be "heirs of eternal glory," than to be "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction."

And there is infinite danger in these delays. For if thy soul be any thing to thee, thou venturest that; if thou hast any tenderness and regard for thy eternal interest, thou runnest the hazard of that; if heaven and hell be any thing to thee, thou incurrest the danger of losing one, and falling into the other.

And thou gainest nothing by continuing unresolved. If death and judgment would tarry thy leisure, and wait till thou hadst brought thy thoughts to some issue, and were resolved what to do, it were something: but thy irresolution in this matter will be so far from keeping back death and judgment, that it will both hasten and aggravate them, both make them to come the sooner, and to be the heavier when they come; because thou abusest the goodness of God, and despisest his patience and long-suffering, which should lead thee,

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and draw thee on to repentance, and not keep thee back. Hereby thou encouragest thyself in thy lewd and riotous courses; and, because thy Lord delayeth his coming, art the more negligent and extravagant. Hear what doom our Lord pronounceth upon such slothful and wicked servant: (Luke xii. 46.) "The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." None so like to be surprised, and to be severely handled by the justice of God, as those that trifle with his patience.

4. Consider how much resolution would tend to the settling of our minds, and making our lives comfortable. There is nothing that perplexeth and disquieteth a man more, than to be unresolved in the great and important concernments of his life. What anxiety and confusion is there in our spirits, whilst we are doubtful and undetermined about such matters? How are we divided and distracted, when our reason and judgment direct us one way, and our lusts and affections bias us to the contrary? When we are convinced and satisfied what is best for us, and yet are disaffected to our own interest. Such a man is all the while self-condemned, and acts with the perpetual regret of his reason and conscience; and whenever he reflects upon himself, he is offended and angry with himself, his life and all his actions are uneasy and displeasing to him; and there is no way for this man to be at peace, but to put an end to this conflict one way or other, either by conquering his reason or his will. The former is very difficult, nothing being harder than for a sinner to lay his conscience asleep, after it is

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once thoroughly awakened; he may charm it for a while, but every little occasion will rouse it again, and renew his trouble; so that though a man may have some truce with his conscience, yet he can never come to a firm and settled peace this way; but if by a vigorous resolution a man would but conquer his will, his mind would be at rest, and there would be a present calm in his spirit. And why should we be such enemies to our own peace, and to the comfort and contentment of our lives, as not to take this course, and thereby rid ourselves at once of that which really, and at the bottom, is the ground of all the trouble and disquiet of our lives?

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# SERMON CLXVIII.

## THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF HOLY RESOLUTION.

*Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*—JOB xxxiv. 31, 32.

THESE words are a description of the temper and behaviour of a true penitent, his confession of sins, and resolution of amendment. Concerning resolution, I have shewn what it is in general: what is the special object or matter of this kind of resolution: what is implied in a sincere resolution of leaving our sins, and returning to God and our duty: that in this resolution the very essence and formal nature of repentance doth consist: and have offered some considerations, to convince men of the necessity and fitness of this resolution, and to keep them steadfast to it. As,

1. That this resolution is nothing but what, under the influence of God's grace, is in our power.

2. The things themselves, which we are to resolve upon, are the strongest arguments that can be for such a resolution.

3. How unreasonable it is for men to be unresolved in a case of so great moment.

4. How much this resolution will tend to the settling of our minds, and making our lives comfortable. I proceed to the considerations which remain.

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5. Then be pleased to consider, that a strong and vigorous resolution would make the whole work of religion easy to us; it would conquer all difficulties which attend a holy and religious course of life, especially at our first entrance into it: because resolution brings our minds to a point, and unites all the strength and force of our souls in one great design, and makes us vigorous and firm, courageous and constant in the prosecution of it: and without this it is impossible to hold out long, and to resist the strong propensions and inclinations of our corrupt nature, which, if we be not firmly resolved, will return, and by degrees gain upon us; it will be impossible to break through temptations, and to gainsay the importunity of them: when the devil and the world solicit us, we shall not be able to say them nay, but shall be apt to yield to them.

There are many who have had faint wishes, and cold desires, and half purposes, of leading a new and better life: but having not taken up a firm resolution in the case, having not determined themselves by a severe purpose, a little thing sways them, and brings them back to their former course; it is no hard matter to divert them and engage them another way; they are "shaken with every wind" of temptation, every little blast of opposition and persecution turns them back, and carries them to the ways of sin: whereas resolution fixeth a man's spirit, and makes it most steadfast and unmoveable, and sets him upon a rock, which, "when the winds blow, and the rain falls, and the floods come," abides firm against all impressions.

If I would give the most probable and useful advice to engage and continue a man in a good course, I would commend to him a deliberate and firm

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resolution. David proved this way with very happy success; (Psal. cxix. 106.) "I have sworn (says he) and will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." This was a security to him against all assaults, and nothing could turn him from his course afterwards; not the dangers he was exposed to, (ver. 109.) "My soul is continually in my hand, yet do I not forget thy law;" not the snares of wicked men that were laid for him, (ver. 110.) "The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I erred not from thy precepts." By virtue of this resolution, he could rise up in defiance of all those that would have tempted him to any sinful action: (ver. 115.) "Depart from me, ye evil doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God."

When a man is thus resolved upon a holy course he is not easily diverted from it, and is able to resist the importunity and flattery of temptations, and to say to them, as men are wont to do, when they are fully and firmly resolved upon any thing, "Let me alone, I am not to be moved, it is in vain to urge me, I am resolved to the contrary." Thus stiff and resolute men can be in other cases, where there is not near that cause and reason for it; and if we would but take up a generous resolution to break off our sins, and to live better lives, this would be the way to conquer that listlessness and unwillingness which hinders us from engaging in a good course, and is the cause of so many lame excuses and unreasonable delays. It is the want of resolution, and the weakness of our resolutions, which is the true reason why we are not more equal, and constant, and uniform in the ways of religion; but are religious only by fits and starts, in a heat, and during some present trouble and conviction of mind.

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"The double-minded man is unstable (says St. James) in all his ways." When a man is of several minds, he is easily moved one way or other.

6. And lastly, Consider the infinite danger of remaining unresolved. The evil day may overtake you, while you are deliberating whether you should avoid it or not. A state of sin is liable to so many hazards, hath so many dangers continually threatening it, and hanging over it, that it is the most imprudent thing in the world to linger in it. It is like Lot's staying in Sodom, when the Lord was going to destroy it, when fire and brimstone were just ready to be rained down from heaven upon it. Whilst men are lingering in a sinful state, if "the Lord be not merciful to them," they will be consumed. Therefore it concerns thee, sinner, to determine thyself speedily, and to make haste out of this dangerous condition, "to escape for thy life, lest some evil overtake thee," and lest death, finding thee unresolved, determine thy case for thee, and put it out of all doubt, and past all remedy.

How many have been cut off in their irresolution! and because they would not determine what to do, God hath concluded their case for them, and "sworn in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest." It may be thou promisest thyself the space of many years to resolve in: "Thou fool, this night thy soul" may "be required of thee;" and whilst thou art unresolved what to do, God is resolving what to do with thee, and putting a period to his patience and long expectation of thy repentance: and thou knowest not how soon God may do this, and make an immutable determination concerning thee. And woe unto thee, when God hath resolved thus!

Suppose thou shouldest be snatched out of the

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world, and hurried before the dreadful tribunal of God, in this doubtful and unresolved state. And this is possible enough; because thou hast no certain tenure of thy life, thou art at no time secured from the stroke of death: nay, it is probable enough, because thou art every moment liable to ten thousand accidents, any one of which may snap in sunder the thread of thy life. And suppose this should happen to thee, what dost thou imagine would become of thee? Wouldest not thou then wish a thousand times that thou hadst resolved in time? How glad wouldest thou then be, that it were possible for thee to retrieve and call back but one of those "days without number," which thou hast so vainly trifled away, that thou mightest resolve upon the things of thy peace! but thou wouldest not do it in that thy day, which God afforded thee to this purpose; thou hast let the opportunity slip out of thy hands, and it will never be in thy power again, but "the things of thy peace will be" for ever "hid from thine eyes."

Why wilt thou then be so foolish, as to run thyself upon the evident hazard of losing heaven, and being miserable for ever? Why wilt thou make work for a sadder and longer repentance, than that which thou dost now so carefully decline? This was the case of the foolish virgins in the parable, (Matt. xxv.) who made account to be ready "to meet the bridegroom" at his coming, but took no care in time to get oil into their lamps. They thought the bridegroom would tarry yet a while longer, and therefore "they slumbered and slept" in great security; but at midnight, when "the cry was made, Behold the bridegroom cometh;" then they arose, and in a great hurry and confusion went about "trimming their lamps;" they were resolved then, they would have

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begged or bought oil; and would have been at any pains or cost for it: but then it was too late; for the door was suddenly shut against them, and no importunity could prevail to have it opened to them.

Canst thou be contented to have the door shut against thee, and when thou shalt cry, "Lord open unto me," to have him return this answer, "Depart from me, I know thee not?" If thou canst not, resolve to prevent this in time.

Didst thou but see, and know, and feel what the miserable do in hell, thou couldest not linger thus, thou couldest not continue so long unresolved. Why the time will come, when thou wilt reflect severely upon thyself, and say, That I should ever be so stupid and sottish, to be unresolved in a matter of such infinite concernment to me! How often was I admonished and convinced of the necessity of changing my course? How many inward motions had I to that purpose? How often did my own reason and conscience, and the Holy Spirit of God, by his frequent and friendly suggestions, put me upon this? How often was I just upon the brink of resolving? I resolved to resolve; but still I delayed it till death seized upon me unresolved: and now the opportunity is lost, and never to be recovered again! I would not in time resolve to be wise and happy; and now, by the sentence of the just and unchangeable God, it is resolved that I must be miserable to all eternity!

How should these considerations quicken us, who have yet these opportunities in our hands; which those who neglected and trifled them away, would now purchase at any rate! I say, how should these considerations which I have proposed, move us to

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take up a present resolution in the matter! Consider these things, sinner, and lay them seriously to heart, and say to thyself, Fool that I have been, to be unresolved so long; not to determine myself in a matter of such mighty consequence; to continue so long in suspense, whether I had best go to heaven or hell, and which was most advisable, to be happy or miserable for ever! Blessed be God, that hath been pleased to exercise so much patience and long-suffering towards me, that hath spared me so long, when he might have taken me away, and cut me off unresolved! My soul lies at stake, and, for aught I know, all eternity depends upon my present and speedy resolution. And now, by God's grace, I will not delay one moment more, I will hang no longer between heaven and hell.—I shall now, in the

Second place, Offer some considerations to persuade those that have taken up this good resolution, to pursue it, and to promote it to practice and execution, and to keep firm and steadfast to it. And to this end, be pleased to consider these three things:

1. What an argument it is of vanity and inconstancy, to change this resolution, whilst the reason of it stands good, and is not changed. I suppose that thou wert once resolved to leave thy sins, and to return to God and thy duty? Why dost thou not pursue this resolution? Why dost thou not persist in it? Surely there appeared to thee some reason why thou didst take it up; and if the reason remain, and appear still the same to thee that it did, how comes it to pass that thou hast altered thy mind, and changed thy purpose? Either the case is the same it was, when thou tookest up this resolu-

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tion, or it is not. If it be altered, then thou hast reason to change thy resolution: if it be not, thou hast the same reason to continue in it, that thou hadst to take it up. Shew then, if thou canst, wherein it is changed? Wert thou mistaken before about the nature of sin, and the pernicious consequences of it; or about the nature of God and goodness? Hast thou any thing now to plead for sin, which thou didst not know or consider before? Art thou now satisfied that sin is not so evil and unreasonable a thing as thou didst once apprehend, or that it does not threaten thee with so much danger as thou didst fear? Hath God altered his opinion of it, or is he become more favourable to it than he was? Hast thou received any news lately from heaven by any good hands, that God hath reversed his threatenings against sin, or that he hath adjourned the judgment of the world, *sine die*, without any set time? That he hath set the devils at liberty, and released them from their chains of darkness, and hath quenched and put out the fire of hell? Or art thou satisfied that there is no such being as God in the world, or that he is not so good as thou didst apprehend him to be, or that he will not reward those that diligently serve him? Hast thou found upon trial, that holiness and virtue are but empty names, and there is nothing in them? That there is not that pleasure and peace in keeping the commandments of God which thou wert told of? I am sure thou canst not with reason pretend any thing of all this. Thy reason, and conscience, and experience cannot speak one word on the behalf of sin, or give any testimony against God and his holy ways. And if the case be the same it was, nothing but thine own vanity and fickleness; or

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some worse reason, could move thee to alter thy purpose.

2. Let it be farther considered, that if we be not constant to our resolution, all we have done is lost. If thou repentest of thy repentance, it will not prove a "repentance to salvation." As good to have stayed in Sodom, as to look back after thou art come out of it. Thus God tells us by the prophet, (Ezek. xxxiii. 12, 13.) "Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: neither shall the righteous be able to live in the day that he sinneth. When I say to the righteous, he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered: but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it." So that, whatever we have done in the work of repentance, what resolutions soever we have taken up; if afterwards we give over and let them fall, all that we have done is lost, and will come to nothing.

3. Let us consider, in the last place, that if we be not constant to our resolution, we shall not only lose all that we have done, but we shall thereby render our condition much worse. "Remember Lot's wife," who, after she was escaped out of Sodom, looked back, and was made a particular and lasting monument of God's wrath and displeasure; which seems to be meant by that expression of her being "turned into a pillar of salt;" that is, "a lasting monument." (Prov. xiv. 14.) "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." "Shall be filled with his own ways;" this expression doth signify a most heavy and dreadful curse upon those who fall off from their good purpose and resolu-

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tion, that they shall have sorrow and trouble enough upon it. For so likewise, (Prov. i. 26, 27.) where God threatens wilful and obstinate sinners with the heaviest judgments, that he would "laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes, when their fear comes as desolation, and their destruction as a whirlwind, and fear and anguish cometh upon them;" he adds, as the sum of all other judgments, that "they shall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices." (Heb. x. 38.) "But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him;" which words are a μείωσις, and signify a great deal more than seems to be expressed. "My soul shall have no pleasure in him;" that is, let such an one expect the effects of God's fiercest wrath and displeasure. For so the Hebrews are wont to express things that are great and unspeakable, when they cannot sufficiently set them forth; by saying less, they say more. So, (Psal. v. 4.) where it is said, "Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness;" the Psalmist means, and would have us to understand it so, that God is so far from taking any pleasure in the sins of men, that he bears the most violent hatred and displeasure against them. So, when the apostle here says, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him;" he means, that it is not to be expressed how God will deal with such persons, and how severely his justice will handle them. To the same purpose is that declaration, (2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.) "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better

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for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." The condition of all impenitent sinners is very sad; but of apostates much worse: not only because the sins which they commit afterwards are much greater, receiving a new aggravation, which the sins of those who are simply impenitent are not capable of; but likewise because such persons are usually more wicked afterwards. For they that break loose from severe purposes and resolutions of a better course, do by this very thing in a great measure sear and conquer their consciences, and then no wonder if afterwards "they give up themselves to commit all iniquity with greediness." When, after long abstinence men return to sin again, their lusts are more fierce and violent; like a man who, after long fasting, returns to his meat with a more raging appetite. This our Saviour sets forth to us in the parable of the unclean spirit's returning again and taking possession of the man, after he had left him: (Matt. xii. 43—45.) "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out: and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and the end of that man is worse than his beginning." The moral of which is, that when a man hath once left his sins, if afterward he entertain thoughts of returning to them again, sin will return upon him with redoubled force and strength, and his heart will be so much the more prepared and disposed for the entertaining of more and greater vices; and



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his leaving his sins for a time, will be but like a running back, that he may leap with greater violence into hell and destruction.

Besides that, such persons do the greatest injury to God and the holy ways of religion that can be, by forsaking them after they have owned and approved them. For it will not be so much regarded, what wicked men, who have always been so, talk against God and religion; because they do not talk from experience, but "speak evil of the things which they know not:" whereas those who forsake the ways of religion after they have once engaged in them, do disparage religion more effectually, and reproach it with greater advantage; because they pretend to speak from the experience they have had of it, they have tried both the ways of sin and the ways of religion, and, after experience of both, they return to sin again: which, what is it but to proclaim to the world that the ways of sin and vice are rather to be chosen than the ways of holiness and virtue; that the devil is a better master than God, and that a sinful and wicked life yields more pleasure and greater advantages than are to be had in keeping the commandments of God? And this must needs be a high provocation, and a heavy aggravation of our ruin. Let these considerations prevail with us to pursue his holy resolution, after we have taken it up, and to persist in it. There remains only the

VI. Sixth and last particular which I proposed to be spoken to; viz. To add some directions for the maintaining and making good of this resolution of repentance and amendment; and they shall be these three:

1. Let us do all in the strength of God, consider-

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ing our necessary and essential dependance upon him, and that without him and the assistance of his grace we can do nothing. "We are not (as the apostle tells us) sufficient of ourselves, as of ourselves," that is, without the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to think any thing that is good, much less to resolve upon it. "It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure;" that is, of his own goodness, as the same apostle speaks, (Phil. ii. 13.) It is God that upholds us in being, and from whom we have all our power as to natural actions; but as to spiritual things, considering the great corruption and depravation of human nature, we stand in need of a more especial and immediate assistance.

If we know any thing of ourselves, we cannot but know what foolish and ignorant creatures we are, how weak and impotent, how averse and opposite to any thing that is good. And therefore it is wise counsel in all cases, but chiefly in spiritual matters, which Solomon gives, (Prov. iii. 5, 6.) "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thy own understanding. Acknowledge him in all thy ways, and he shall direct thy steps." Let us then address ourselves to God, in the words of the holy prophet: (Jer. x. 23.) "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, and that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." And let us beg of him, that he would consider our case, commiserate our weakness, and pity our impotency, and that he would join his strength to us, and grant us the assistance of his grace and Holy Spirit, to put us upon sincere resolutions of a new life, and to keep us constant and steadfast to them; "to open the eyes of our minds, and to turn us from



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darkness to light, and from the power of Satan and our lusts unto God; that we may repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance, that so we may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in Christ."

And for our encouragement in this matter, God hath bid us to apply ourselves to him; and he hath promised not to be wanting to us, in words as express and universal as can well be devised: (Jam. i, 5, 6.) "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth no man; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering;" that is, not doubting but that God is both able and willing to give what he asks. And, (Luke xi. 9—13.) "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If a son should ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" To encourage our faith, our Saviour useth such an argument as may give us the greatest assurance. We are commonly confident, that our earthly parents will not deny us those things that are good and necessary for us, though they may be otherwise evil: "How much more then shall our heavenly Father," who is essentially and infinitely good, give his Holy Spirit to us? And if this be not enough, St. Mat-

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thew useth a larger expression, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" If there be any thing that is good, and we stand in need of it, and earnestly pray to God for it, we may be confident that he will give it us.

2. We ought to be very watchful over ourselves, considering our weakness and wavering, and instability and fickleness, the treachery and deceitfulness of our own hearts, and the malice of Satan. It will be a great while before the habits of sin be so weakened and subdued as that we shall have no propension to return to them again; so that our hearts will be often endeavouring to return to their former posture, and, like a deceitful bow, which is not firmly strung, to start back. And besides the deceitfulness of sin and our own hearts, the devil is very malicious, and his malice will make him vigilant to watch all advantages against us; and his great design will be to shake our resolution; for if that stand, he knows his kingdom will fall, and therefore he raiseth all his batteries against this fort, and labours by all means to undermine it; and nothing will be matter of greater triumph to him than to gain a person that was revolted from him, and resolved to leave his service. If, therefore, thou expectest God's grace and assistance to keep thee steadfast to thy resolution, do not neglect thyself, but "keep thy heart with all diligence," and watch carefully over thyself; for because "God worketh in us both to will and to do," therefore he expects that "we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling," lest, by our own carelessness and neglect, we should miscarry.

3. Let us frequently renew and reinforce our

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resolutions, more especially when we think of coming to the sacrament, and approaching the holy table of the Lord. Nothing is more apt to beget in us good resolutions, and to strengthen them, than to consider the dreadful sufferings of the Son of God for our sins, which are so lively set forth and represented to us in this holy sacrament; which, as it is, on God's part, a seal and confirmation of his grace and love to us; so, on our part, it ought to be a solemn ratification of our covenant with God, "to depart from iniquity," and "to walk before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives."

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# SERMON CLXIX.

## THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF RESTITUTION.

*And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house.*—LUKE xix. 8, 9.

ONE particular and eminent fruit of true repentance, is the making of restitution and satisfaction to those whom we have injured. As for God, we can make no satisfaction and compensation to him, for the injuries we have done him by our sins; all that we can do in respect of God, is to confess our sins to him, to make acknowledgment of our miscarriages, to be heartily troubled for what we have done, and not to do the like for the future. But for injuries done to men, we may, in many cases, make reparation and satisfaction. And this, as it is one of the best signs and evidences of a true repentance; so it is one of the most proper and genuine effects of it: for this is as much as in us lies to undo what we have done, and to unsin our sins.

But, because the practice of this duty doth so interfere with the interest of men, and consequently it will be very difficult to convince men of their duty in this particular, and to persuade them to it; therefore I design to handle this particular fruit and effect of a true repentance by itself, from these words, which contain in them,

I. The fruit and effect of Zaccheus's conversion

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and repentance; "If I have taken any thing from any man, I restore him fourfold."

II. The declaration which our Saviour makes hereupon, of the truth of his repentance and conversion, and the happy state he was thereby put into. "And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is the son of Abraham;" as if he had said, By these fruits and effects it appears, that this is a repentance to salvation; and this man whom you look upon as a sinner and a heathen, may, by better right, call Abraham father, than any of you formal pharisees and Jews, who glory so much in being the "children of Abraham."

I. The fruit and effect of Zaccheus's conversion and repentance; "And if," &c.

This Zaccheus, as you find at the 2d verse, was chief of the publicans, which was an office of great odium and infamy among the Jews, they being the collectors of the tribute which the Roman emperor, under whose power the Jews then were, did exact from them. And because these publicans farmed this tribute of the emperor at a certain rent, they made a gain out of it themselves, by exacting and requiring more of the people than was due upon that account; so that their calling was very infamous upon three accounts.

1. Because they were the instruments of oppressing their countrymen; for so they looked upon the tax they paid to the Romans, as a great oppression.

2. Because they were forced by the necessity of their calling to have familiar conversation with heathens, whom they looked upon as sinners. Hence the phrase used by the apostle, of "sinners of the gentiles." And hence, likewise, probably it is,

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that publicans and sinners, publicans and heathens, are joined several times together, because of the occasions of frequent converse which the publicans had with the heathens.

3. But, principally, they were odious because of the common injustice and oppression which they used in the management of their calling, by fraud and violence extorting more than was due, to enhance the profit of their places. Hence it is, that this sort of officers have been generally branded, and reckoned among the worst sort of men. So he in the comedy, Πάντες τελῶναι, πάντες εἰσὶν ἅρπαγες, "all publicans are rapacious or robbers." And this is most probably the sin which Zaccheus here repents of, and in regard to which he promises restitution, καὶ εἴ τινος ἐσυκοφάντησα, "And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation;" so we render the words in our translation: but the word ἐσυκοφάντησα signifies more generally, "If I have been injurious to any one, if I have wronged any man," as appears by the constant use of this word by the LXX. who by this word do translate the most general Hebrew words which signify any kind of injury or oppression, either by fraud, or violence, or calumny. So that there is no reason here to restrain it, "wronging men by false accusation:" for Zaccheus's sin being in all probability extorting more than was due, this might as easily be done many other ways, as "by false accusation." And that this was the common sin of the publicans, appears by the counsel which John the Baptist gives them: (Luke iii. 12, 13.) "Then came also the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you;" that

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is, do not, by fraud or violence, extort from any man more than the tribute which is laid upon him.

So that Zaccheus here promiseth, that if he had been injurious to any man in his office, by extorting more than was due, he would restore to him fourfold. And if Zaccheus calculated his estate right, and intended to reserve any part of it to himself, which is but reasonable to suppose, it could be no very great part of his estate which was so injuriously got: and I am afraid a far smaller proportion than many are guilty of, who yet pass for very honest men in comparison of the publicans. The text saith, he was "a rich man." Suppose he was worth ten or twelve thousand pounds; half he gives to the poor, that was well got, or else his whole estate could not have made a fourfold restitution for it. Suppose he reserved a thousand or two to himself; then, at the rate of restoring fourfold, not above a thousand can be injuriously got; that is, about a penny in the shilling. I am afraid that now-a-days there are few such moderate oppressors: nay, it is possible that the proportion of his estate injuriously got might be much less; more it could not easily be. But whatever it was, he does not plead that by way of excuse for himself; he freely confesseth he had sinned in this kind, and offers restitution to the utmost, much more than the law did require in such cases.

II. You have the declaration our Saviour makes hereupon, of the truth of his repentance and conversion, and the happy state he was thereby put into, "This day is salvation come to this house."

The observation I shall make from hence is this, that restitution and satisfaction for the injuries we have done to others, is a proper and genuine effect

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of true repentance. I know the text only speaks of restitution in case of oppression and exaction: but, because there is the same reason why restitution should be made for all other injuries, I think I may, without any force or violence to my text, very well make it the foundation of a more general discourse concerning restitution.

In handling of this, I shall,

First, Open to you the nature of this duty.

Secondly, Confirm the truth of the proposition, by shewing the necessity of it.

Thirdly, Endeavour to persuade men to the discharge of this necessary duty.

First, For the opening the nature of this duty, I will consider,

I. The act.

II. The latitude or extent of the object, as I may call it, or the matter about which it is conversant.

III. The manner how it is to be done.

IV. The measure of it.

V. The persons who are bound to make restitution, and to whom it is to be made.

VI. The time in which it is to be done.

VII. The order of doing it, where more are injured, and restitution cannot be made at once to all.

I. For the act. Restitution is nothing else but the making reparation or satisfaction to another for the injuries we have done him. It is to restore a man to the good condition from which, contrary to right and to our duty, we have removed him. Restitution is only done in case of injury. Another man may be damaged and prejudiced by us many ways, and we not be bound to make restitution: because there are many cases wherein a man deserves the prejudice we do to him: as, when we are

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instruments of inflicting upon a man the punishment which the law doth sentence him to. And there are many cases wherein we may be prejudicial to others, and cannot help it: as a man that is sick of a contagious disease, may infect others that are about him: but he is not injurious to them; because it is not his fault but his infelicity.

II. For the latitude and extent of the object, as I may call it, or the matter about which it is conversant. It extends to all kind of injuries, which may be reduced to these two heads; either we injure a person with or without his consent.

1. Some injuries are done to persons with their consent. Such are most of those injuries which are done to the souls of men, when we command, or counsel, or encourage them to sin, or draw them in by our example. For the maxim, *Volenti non fit injuria*, "There is no injury done to a man that is willing," is not so to be understood, as that a man may not in some sort consent to his own wrong: for absolute freedom and willingness supposeth that a man is wholly left to himself, and that he understands fully what he does. And in this sense no man sins willingly; that is, perfectly knowing and actually considering what he does; and commands, and persuasion, and example, are a kind of violence; yet none of these hinder, but that a man in these cases may sufficiently consent to what he does. But yet he is not so perfectly free, as to excuse him that draws him into sin by these ways. So likewise when a man refuseth to do that which is his duty without a reward; for instance, to do justice to another; he is injurious in so doing: but yet not altogether without the consent of him whom he injures.

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2. Injuries are done to persons without their consent. And these, though they are not always the greatest mischiefs, yet they are the greatest injuries. And these injuries are done either by fraud and cunning, or by violence and oppression: either by overreaching another man in wit, or overbearing him by power. And these usually either respect the bodies of men, or their estates, or their good name. The bodies of men: he that maims another, or does him any other injury in his limbs or health, either by fraud or by force, is bound, so far as he is able, to make reparation for the injury. Or they respect the estates of men: if by cunning, or by violence, or by false testimony, or accusation, thou hast hindered a man of any benefit, which otherwise would have come to him, thou art bound to restitution. If by thy power or interest, by thy knowledge in the law, or skill in business, thou hast directly and avowedly helped and assisted another to do injustice to his neighbour, thou art bound to restitution; though not as the principal, yet as the accessory. If thou hast overreached thy brother in any contract, making advantage of his ignorance or unskilfulness; if thou hast made a gain of his necessity; if thou hast by thy power and interest, or by any more violent and forcible way detained his right, or taken away that which was his, thou art bound to make reparation for these injuries, to restore that which thou hast borrowed, to return the pledge which thou hast wrongfully kept, to release unconscionable forfeitures, to pay debts, to make satisfaction for frauds and cheats, to take off all unjust invasions and surprisals of estates: yea, though the fraud be such that thou art not liable to make satisfaction by any human law; yet thou art as much bound to it

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in conscience to God and thy duty, as if thou hadst stolen or taken it by violence from thy neighbour. For in truth and reality, fraud is as great an injury as violence, although human laws cannot take cognizance of it, so as to relieve every man that is overreached in a bargain: nay, of the two, it is worse; for whenever thou deceivest a man in this kind, thou dost not only wrong him in point of estate, but thou abusest his understanding.

And so likewise in respect of a man's fame and reputation. If thou hast hurt any man's good name by slander or calumny, by false witness, by rendering him ridiculous, or any other way, thou art bound to give such satisfaction as the thing is capable of; or if there be any other injury which I have not mentioned, thou art obliged to make reparation for it.

III. As to the manner how restitution is to be made,

1. Thou art bound to do it voluntarily, and of thy own accord, though the person injured do not know who it was that did him the injury, though he do not seek reparation by law. When a man is forced by law to make restitution, it is not a virtue, but necessity; this is not a fruit of repentance and a good mind, but of good law. And that thou dost not do it, unless the law compel thee to it, is an argument thou wouldest not have done it, if thou couldest have avoided it. And though the thing be done, yet thou hast not done it, but the law; and unless thou heartily repent of thy crime, the injury still lies at thy door, and in God's account thou art as guilty as if no restitution had been made. Not that thou art bound, in this case, to make new restitution over again; but thou art bound to bewail

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thy neglect, that thou didst not do it voluntarily, and without the compulsion of the law.

2. Thou must do it in kind, if the thing be capable of it, and the injured party demand it. Thou must restore the very thing which thou hadst deprived thy neighbour of, if it be such a thing as can be restored, and be still in thy power, unless he voluntarily accept of some other thing in exchange.

3. If thou canst not restore it in kind, thou art bound to restore it in value, in something that is as good. As for spiritual injuries done to the souls of men, we are bound to make such reparation and compensation as we can. Those whom we have drawn into sin, and engaged in wicked courses, by our influence and example, or by neglect of our duty towards them, we are, so far as becomes the relation we stand in to them, to make acknowledgment of our fault, to endeavour by our instruction and counsel to reclaim them from those sins we led them into, and "to recover them out of the snare of the devil;" and should never be at rest till we have done as much, or more, for the furtherance of their salvation, and helping them forwards towards heaven, as we did contribute before to their ruin and destruction. If we have violated any one's chastity, we are bound to marry them, if it was done upon that condition, and if they require it; thou art bound to keep and maintain those children which are the fruit of thy lust, and to make reparation to the person whom thou hast injured, by dowry or otherwise.

If thou hast defrauded and injured any man in his good name, thou art obliged to make him a compensation by acknowledgment of thy fault, by a studious vindication of him, and by doing him ho-

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nour, and repairing his credit in all fitting ways. And if the injury be irreparable (as it frequently happens, that we can hardly so effectually vindicate a man, as we can defame him; and it is seldom seen that those wounds which are given to men's reputation are perfectly healed), I say, if the injury be irreparable, especially if it prove really prejudicial to a man in his calling and civil interest; if no other satisfaction will be accepted, it is to be made in money, which, Solomon says, "answers all things;" and the rather, because the reason and equity of human laws hath thought fit to assign this way of satisfaction in many cases upon actions of scandal and defamation. And whatever the law would give, in any case, if it could be proved, that is the least we are bound in conscience to do, when we are guilty to ourselves, though the law cannot take hold of us.

So likewise, if thou hast wounded a man, thou art bound to pay the cure, to repair to him and his relations the disability for his calling, and his way of livelihood and subsistence, which he hath contracted by thy injury. And so for false imprisonment, the real detriment which comes to him by it, is to be made amends for: and so, in all other cases, the injured person is, so far as is possible, to be restored to the good condition in which he was before the injury.

IV. As to the measure and proportion of the restitution we are to make. Zaccheus here offers fourfold, which was much beyond what any law required in like cases. The measure of restitution by the judicial law of the Jews, did very much vary, according to the kind and degree of the injury. In some cases, a man was only bound to simple resti-

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tution; but then he was to do it to the full, (Exod. xxii. 5, 6.) And so if that which is another man's be "delivered unto his neighbour to keep, and be stolen from him, he is to make restitution thereof," (ver. 12.) "And so if a man borrow aught of his neighbour, and it be hurt or die, the owner thereof not being with it, he shall surely make it good," (ver. 14.) "But for all manner of trespasses," by way of theft, "whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, he whom the judge shall condemn, shall pay double to his neighbour;" (ver. 9.) that is, if it be of a living creature, "if the theft be found in his hands alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep, he shall restore double," (ver. 4.) But if a man did "steal an ox or a sheep, and did kill it, or sell it," he was to restore "five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep." And thus we find David judged upon Nathan's parable of the rich man, who had taken the poor man's only lamb, and killed and dressed it for a traveller that came to him, (2 Sam. xii. 6.) "He shall restore the lamb fourfold." Now the reason of this seems to be partly because of the advantage and usefulness of those creatures above any other; and partly because when they were once killed or alienated, a man could not, without great trouble and difficulty, make discovery; which hazard of not discovering seems to be accounted for in the restitution; but if a man did voluntarily offer restitution, before he was prosecuted, for any thing that was taken by violence, or unjustly detained from his neighbour, then he was only "to restore the principal, and to add a fifth part thereto, and to offer up an offering



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to the Lord," and so "his atonement was made," (Levit. vi. 1, &c.)

So that the highest proportion was a fourth or fifth part, and that only in the particular case of sheep or oxen stolen away, and killed or alienated afterwards. Indeed, Solomon speaks of a sevenfold restitution, (Prov. vi. 31.) where he saith, "If a thief be found, he shall restore sevenfold, even all the substance of his house;" where seven is only a number of perfection, and the meaning is, he shall make perfect and full restitution, according to the law, so far as his substance or estate will reach.

So that it seems Zaccheus, in restoring fourfold, did outdo the utmost severity of the law; which in case of fraud and oppression was but double, if demanded; if voluntarily offered, was the principal, and a fifth part added; but to testify the truth of his repentance, and his hearty sorrow for the injuries he had done, he punisheth himself beyond what the law would have done.

I do not say that this example binds as to this measure and proportion: nay, I do not say we are bound to the proportions of the law; for that only concerned the nation of the Jews: but although we be free from the letter of the law, yet we are tied to the equity of it. As to the substance of the duty of restitution, we are bound to that by the law of nature: as to the measure and proportion, the equity of the judicial law in its proportions, and of Zaccheus's example, ought to be considerable to us.

But to speak more particularly concerning the measures and proportions of restitution, I shall lay down these propositions:

I. Where restitution can be made in kind, or the

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injury can be certainly valued, we are to restore the thing or the value.

2. We are bound to restore the thing, with the natural increase of it; that is, to satisfy for the loss sustained in the mean time, and the gain hindered.

3. Where the thing cannot be restored, and the value of it is not certain, we are to give reasonable satisfaction, that is, according to a middle estimation; not the highest nor the lowest of things of the kind. The injured person can demand no more, and strict justice requires no more. But it is safe for him that hath done the injury, rather to exceed than to fall short.

4. We are at least to give by way of restitution what the law would give, for that is generally equal, and in most cases rather favourable than rigorous.

5. A man is not only bound to restitution for the injury which he did, but for all that directly follows upon his injurious act, though it were beyond his intention. For the first injury being wilful, thou art presumed to will all that which directly followed upon it, according to that rule, *Involuntarium ortum ex voluntaria censetur pro voluntario:* "We are presumed to will that which follows upon a voluntary action, though we did not intend it." For instance, if a man maliciously and knowingly set fire upon another man's house, though he intended only an injury to that particular person, yet if a wind come and drive the fire to his neighbours' at some distance, though he did not intend this, yet, because the first act was unlawful, he is liable to satisfy for all the direct consequences of it. If a man wound another without any intention of killing him, and the wound prove mortal, though there was no probability that death would ensue upon it, the man is bound, because the



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first act was injurious, to make reparation to his relations for the damage they sustain by his death; and if they did depend solely upon him who died by such injury, thou art bound to maintain them.

6. Because those who have lived in a trade and course of injustice can hardly remember all the particular injuries they have done, so as to make exact satisfaction for them, it will not be amiss, over and besides, to give something to the poor. So Zaccheus does here, "Half of my estate I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing," &c.

V. The persons who are concerned in restitution. And here I shall consider,

First, The persons who are bound to make restitution.

Secondly, The persons to whom it is to be made.

First, The persons who are bound to make restitution. In general, they who have done the injury, or they who come into their stead, so as in law or equity the injury devolves and descends upon them. But for the clearer stating of this, I shall lay down several propositions which may serve to resolve a great many cases that may be put concerning persons obliged to make restitution.

1. If the injury be done solely by one, without accomplices and partakers in the crime, he alone is responsible, and wholly bound to make satisfaction; I mean, he only is bound so long as he lives; but if the injury descends as a burthen upon the estate, then he who enjoys the estate becomes bound to make satisfaction, as I shall shew afterwards.

2. If the injury was done by more, who did all equally concur to the doing of it, they are all equally bound to make satisfaction, and they are bound to concur together to that purpose; and in case of

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such concurrence, every one is not bound to satisfy for the whole, but *pro rata parte*, for his share; provided they do among them make full satisfaction.

3. If all will not concur, those that are willing are bound among them to make reparation for the injury: nay, if all the rest refuse to join with thee in it, thou art bound *in solidum* to make full reparation so far as thou art able; because every one was guilty of the whole injury. For instance, if four men conspire together to cheat a man, or to rob him, any one of these, if the rest refuse, is bound to make entire satisfaction; yea, though he was only partaker in the benefit; because, as I said before, he is guilty of the whole injury.

4. If the injury be done by more, who do unequally concur to the doing of it, he that is principal is chiefly and principally bound to make satisfaction; and here I do not take *principal* strictly in the sense of the law, but in the sense of equity; not for him always who is the more immediate cause of the injury, but for him who was the greatest cause, and by whose influence chiefly it was procured and done: but if the principal will not, the accessories and instruments are bound, at least for their share, and according to the proportion of the hand they had in it. But if the principal do satisfy in the name, and upon the account of the rest, then the accessories are free from an obligation to restitution, and are only bound to repentance.

5. If the injury devolve upon another, by descending as a burden upon the estate, he who enjoys the estate is bound to make satisfaction. And when injuries do thus descend as burdens and incumbrances upon estates, and when not, the civil laws of the place where we live must determine:

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but then where my case falls within the compass of the law, I am bound voluntarily to satisfy without the compulsion of the law. For instance, if an estate fall to me charged with a debt, which hath been unjustly detained, I am bound voluntarily to discharge the debt, so soon as it appears to me, before I am compelled thereto by the law.

6. As for personal injuries which do not lie as burdens upon the estate, nor do by the law descend upon the son or heir, though in strict justice a man be not bound to make compensation for them, for that would be endless, *et infinitum in lege repudiatur*, "no law can take notice of that which is infinite and endless;" for *quæ exitum non habent habentur pro impossibilibus*, "those things which have no end, to which no bounds can be set, are esteemed among things impossible," to which no man can be obliged: but though in strict justice the heir be not bound to make reparation for the personal injuries of him whom he succeeds in the estate, yet in many cases it is equitable, and generous, and Christian, for such persons to make some kind of reparation for palpable and notorious injuries. For instance, if I be heir to an estate, part of which I know certainly was injuriously gotten, it is not only Christian, but prudent, to make satisfaction in the case to the party injured, if certainly known; if not, to give it to the poor; for by this means I may take out the moth which was bred by injustice in the estate, and rub off the rust that sticks to the gold and silver which was got by oppression or fraud, and so free the remaining part of the estate from that secret and Divine Nemesis which attends it and follows it. And for the same reason, it is very noble and Christian for the son and heir of an un-

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just father to make some reparation for his father's injuries by restitution, if the thing be capable of it: if not, by doing all good offices to the injured persons, which is some kind of compensation. And in this case the obligation is greater, because by this means a man does not only do what in him lies to cut off the curse, which, by his father's oppression and injustice, is entailed upon the family and estate; but, likewise, because a son ought much more to be concerned for his father than any other person, and to consult the honour and reputation both of him and his own family; and the reparation which the son makes, is in some sort the father's act, because he succeeds him, and comes in his stead.

Secondly, As to the persons to whom satisfaction is to be made. For the resolution of those cases which may fall under this head, I shall lay down these propositions:

1. If the injured person be certainly known, and be alive and extant, the satisfaction is to be made to him.

2. If he be not alive, or, which is all one, not to be found or come at, satisfaction is to be made to his nearest relations, his wife, or children, or brothers, or other nearest kindred. The reason is, because satisfaction being due, and I having no right to keep that which I have injuriously gotten, if I cannot restore it to the party himself, I ought in all reason to place it there where I may most reasonably presume the party injured would have bestowed his estate, and this part of it amongst the rest, had he been possessed of it. And by the same reason that I am bound thus to restore the part of his estate which I have injuriously taken or detained from him, I am likewise obliged to give satisfaction to

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the same person for any other injury; for to whomsoever I would pay a debt due to one that is deceased, to the same person I ought to give satisfaction for the injuries by which a debt is, though not formally, yet virtually contracted.

3. If the party injured be not certainly known, or have no near relations known to me, in that case I think it very advisable to give so much to the poor, or to some charitable use; or if the party injured be not capable of proper satisfaction, as sometimes it is a community and body of men that you have injured; in this case it is proper to repair the injuries to communities or bodies of men, by equivalent good offices, or by some public good work, which may be of common benefit and advantage.—This is the fifth thing I proposed to speak to, the persons concerned in restitution; both the persons who are bound to make restitution, and the persons to whom it is to be made. Of the rest hereafter.

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# SERMON CLXX.

## THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF RESTITUTION.

*And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house.*—LUKE xix. 8, 9.

IN speaking to these words, I proposed to consider,

First, The nature of this duty of restitution.

Secondly, To shew the necessity of it.

Thirdly, To persuade men to the discharge of it.

In treating of the nature of restitution, I have considered,

I. The act.

II. The extent of it.

III. The manner how it is to be performed.

IV. The measure of it.

V. The persons who are to make restitution; and the persons to whom restitution is to be made. I now proceed to consider,

VI. The time when restitution is to be made. In these cases a man is not tied up to an instant, not just to the present time, unless the case be such that he can never do it, if he do not do it then. As, if a man lie upon his death-bed; that is a case that admits of no delay, a man should hasten restitution, as he would do the making of his will, and the disposal of his estate; lest, if he do not do it presently, he lose his opportunity of doing it for ever; but ordinarily, a man is not so strictly tied up to moments, and to the present time. It is sufficient that a man be for the present resolved to do it so soon

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as morally he can, so soon as he would do other actions of great moment and concernment. And to this purpose the text gives us an excellent pattern; Zaccheus the same day he repented took up this resolution, and to oblige himself effectually to put it in execution he publicly declares it, and before all the people offers to make restitution to all whom he had injured.

Therefore take heed of all unnecessary delays in these matters: for though God would accept of a firm and sincere resolution in this case, if a person thus resolved should, before he could bring his resolution to effect, happen to be cut off by death, or be otherwise rendered incapable of doing it; I say, though God would accept such a resolution as this, yet he will not interpret that to be a sincere resolution which a man is negligent to put in practice; for every neglect of putting our resolution in practice, is a degree of quitting and altering it; and he who did not do what he was resolved to do, when he had an opportunity and ability of doing it, is justly presumed to have let fall his resolution.

Therefore, let no man presume upon his good intention and resolution in this kind; for they are only acceptable to God so far as they are sincere and real; and they are only so far sincere and real, as the man that makes them is ready to put them in execution so soon as morally he can. And if thou carelessly and supinely trifle away thy opportunities in this kind, God may likewise deprive thee of an opportunity for ever. For all the while thou wilfully neglectest to make restitution, thou art guilty of the injury; and there are hardly two sins that cry louder to God for a quick and speedy revenge, than injustice and oppression, deceit and fraud. God

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many times takes such causes into his more immediate cognizance: (1 Thess. iv. 6.) "Let no man deceive or go beyond his brother in any thing: for God is the avenger of such." And David tells us, that God, in a peculiar manner, "abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man;" and threatens that "he shall not live out half his days." And God, by the prophet, (Mal. iii. 5.) tells us, that "he will be a swift witness against the oppressors." And if God be so swift to take vengeance upon such persons, surely then they are concerned to be very quick and speedy in making satisfaction for their injuries and oppressions, lest Divine vengeance prevent them, and instead of making reparation to men, they be called upon to make satisfaction to the justice of God; and you know who hath said it, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

You, therefore, that have hitherto neglected this duty, delay it no longer; by all means discharge your consciences of this burden, before you come to lie upon a death-bed. Then the consciences of the worst of men begin to work, like a stomach oppressed and surcharged with meat; and then they are willing for their ease to vomit up those estates which they have devoured by fraud and injustice; then they begin to consider the difficulty of being saved, and to fear that it will be impossible for them ever "to enter in at the strait gate," thus laden with the spoils of violence and deceit; even those that have the hardest and most seared consciences, will be touched with the sense of such great sins at such a time; but do not thou defer this work to that time, for these two reasons:

1. Because it cannot be so acceptable to God, to make restitution at such a time, as when thou art in

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health, and in hopes of longer life. To give a man his own, when thou canst enjoy it and use it no longer, this is next to detaining of it.

2. Because in all probability the restitution which is then made will not prove so effectual. What thou dost thyself, that thou art sure is done: but what thou leavest to be done by thy executors, and chargest upon them, thou art not sure will be done; ten to one but if they can find out any trick and evasion in law, either to delay or avoid the doing of it, it shall either never be done, or very slowly. This is the sixth thing, the time when restitution is to be made.

But before I leave this head, there is one case very proper to be considered, which relates to this circumstance of time, and that is concerning injuries of a very ancient date; that is, how far this duty of restitution is to look backward, and whether it doth not expire by tract of time? For answer to this, I shall lay down these propositions:

1. At what distance of time soever the law would in the case make reparation and give satisfaction, we are undoubtedly bound in conscience voluntarily to give it. I deliver this generally, because, though it be possible some civil laws may be in some cases unreasonable in this matter, yet they are our best rule and guide; and, speaking generally, and for the most part, they are as equitable as the reason of man could devise. Not that we are to tie ourselves strictly to the law, so as not to go farther, if reason and equity require; for, as Seneca says, *Parum est ad legem bonum esse*, "It is no great argument of goodness, to be just as good as the law requires." Therefore I think it will very well become a good man, in many cases, rather to be better than the law, than to keep strictly to it.

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2. In cases where the law hath not determined the time, we may do well to observe a proportion to what the law hath determined in other cases, which come nearest our own case.

3. When the injury is so old, that the right which the injured person had to reparation is reasonably presumed to be quitted and forsaken, then the obligation to satisfaction ceaseth and expires. The reason is plain, because every man may recede from his own right, and give it up to another: and where a man may reasonably be presumed to have parted with his right to another, the obligation to restitution ceaseth, and the right of claiming it. Now when a thing begins *haberi pro derelicto*, that is, when a right may reasonably be presumed to be quitted and forsaken, cannot in general be determined: but this must be estimated according to the importance of the right and thing in controversy, as whether it be more or less considerable; and according to the reason and determination of laws about things of this nature. To illustrate this rule by instances:—the Saxons, Danes, and Normans, did at several times invade and conquer this nation, and conquered it, we will suppose, unjustly, and consequently did hold and possess that which truly belonged to others, contrary to right; and several of the posterity of each of these do probably to this day hold what was then injuriously gotten; I say, in this case, the obligation to satisfaction and restitution is long since expired, and the original title which those who were dispossessed had, is reasonably presumed to be long since quitted and forsaken: and that for very wise reasons in law and government; because it would confound and unsettle all estates, if every thing, the original title whereof is

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and restitution. So that our obligation to restitution is founded in the immutable and indispensable law of nature, which is— to do that to another which we would have another do to us. We would have no man be injurious to us, or if he hath been so, we would have him make satisfaction and reparation to us of the injury he hath done; and we take it grievously from him if he do not. Now nothing is more just and equitable, than that we should do that to others which we, in like case, would expect from them: for the very same obligation that lies upon others towards us, does lie upon us in regard to others.

II. This will yet further appear, if we consider the nature of repentance, which is to be sorry for what we have done, and not to do the like for the future. Now if thou be sorry for what thou hast done, thou wishest with all thy heart thou hadst not done it; and if thou dost so, thou wilt undo, as much as in thee lieth, what thou hast done. Now the best way to undo an injury, is to make reparation for it; and till we do this, we continue in the sin. For if it was a sin to do the injury at first, it is the same continued, not to make satisfaction; and we do not cease to commit the sin, so long as we detain that which is another's right. Nothing but restitution can stop the progress of sin; for if it be a sin to take that which is another man's from him by fraud and violence, it is the same continued and virtually repeated, to detain and keep it from him; and nothing more contrary to repentance, than to continue in the sin thou pretendest to repent of. For how art thou sorry for doing of it, if thou continuest to do it, if thou wilt go on to do it, and do it again? How dost thou hate thy sin, if thou en-

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joy the benefit and reap the advantage of it? If thou dost this, it is an argument thou lovest thy sin still: for thou didst never love it for itself, but for the profit of it; and so long as thou retainest that, thou canst not be quit of the sin. Thou holdest fast thy sin so long as thou refusest to make satisfaction for it; and repentance without restitution differs as much from true repentance, as continuance in sin does from the forsaking of it. *Si res aliena non redditur, non agitur pœnitentia, sed fingitur;* so St. Augustine; "If we do not restore that which we have injuriously detained from another, our repentance is not real, but feigned and hypocritical," and will not be effectual to the obtaining of our pardon. It is a very common, but a true and terrible saying, *Non demittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum:* "No remission without restitution." If we will inherit the profit and advantage of sin, we cannot think it unreasonable or unjust that we should inherit the punishment of it.

When the Scripture speaks of repentance, it frequently mentions restitution as a proper fruit and effect of it, and as a necessary and indispensable condition of pardon and life. (Ezek. xxxiii. 14—16.) "Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he hath robbed," &c. As if he had said, when I denounce death and destruction to the wicked, there is but this one way to escape it, and that is, by repentance; but then take notice what a repentance it is that will avail to this end; it is not a bewailing ourselves, and lamenting over our sins, but a forsaking of them, and returning to our duty; "If we turn from our sin, and do that which is law-



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ful and right." For instance, if he hath been guilty of injustice and oppression; if he leave his course, and deal justly and righteously with his neighbour, and not only so, but he also make restitution for the injury he hath done, and restore what he hath unjustly detained and taken away; "If he restore the pledge, and give again that he hath robbed," and do no injustice for the future, but "walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity;" upon these terms, and no other, "he shall live; he shall not die." Yea, the very light of nature could suggest thus much to the people of Nineveh, that there was no hope, without this fruit of repentance, of appeasing God's wrath. Therefore the king and the princes, after all the external solemnity of fasting and sackcloth, and crying mightily, they decree that "Every one should return from the evil of his ways, and from the violence that was in their hands;" *ut rapina manus vacuefaciat, et rapta restituat, sine quo non est vera pœnitentia;* so Grotius upon the place, "That he empty his hands of the spoils of rapine and oppression;" that is, "that he make restitution, without which there can be no repentance:" and upon their doing this, it is said that God spared them, (Jonah iii. 10.) "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways." It is not said, that he saw their fasting and sackcloth, but he saw their works, the real fruits and effects of their repentance; and upon this it was that "God repented of the evil he said he would do to them, and he did it not." And elsewhere we find, that God speaks with great indignation of the most solemn repentance which is not accompanied with this fruit: (Isa. lviii. 3—6.) the people tell God how they had fasted and afflicted their soul, and made their voice to be

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heard on high: but God despiseth all this, because it was not accompanied with this fruit of repentance: "Is it such a fast as I have chosen?" &c. There is so much of natural justice and equity in restitution, and it is so proper a fruit of repentance, that, as Grotius observes, it is not only the doctrine of the Jews and Christians, but of heathens and Mahometans, that the repentance which does not produce this fruit, is feigned, and will never avail with God for pardon and mercy. Thus much for confirmation of this doctrine.

The third and last thing I proposed was, to persuade to the practice of this duty; and this may serve by way of application of the doctrine of restitution. The use we make of it is,

First, To persuade men to the practice of this difficult duty. I doubt not but the arguments I have used are sufficient to convince us of the equity and necessity of restitution; but what arguments shall I use to persuade to the practice and exercise of it? When we press men to their duty, though we have some advantages on our side, yet we have also great disadvantages. We have this advantage, that we have the reason and consciences of men on our side; but then we have this disadvantage, that we have to contend either with the lusts or interests of men, or both: now that these are usually more powerful, is evident in that the lusts and interests of men do so frequently bias and draw them to do things contrary to reason and conscience. When we persuade men to be just, and to make restitution to those whom they have injured, it is true we have not to contend with the lusts of men, with any corrupt and vicious inclination of nature. There are some sins that have their rise from men's natural



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tempers, as passion and lust, and those sensual vices that abound in the world: but there is nothing in any man's natural temper and disposition that inclines him to be unjust, no man's complexion doth particularly dispose him to lie or steal, to defraud his neighbour, or detain his right from him; it is only the interests of men that prompt them to these things; and they are upon this account the more inexcusable, because no man is inclined to these sins from particular temper and constitution: so that an unjust man is in ordinary cases and circumstances a greater sinner, than a drunkard or a lustful man, because no man can pretend to be hurried away by the strong propension and inclination of his nature to cheat his brother; but although, when we persuade men to be just, we have not the lusts of men to contend withal, yet we have another powerful adversary, and that is the interests of men, which is one of the chief "rulers and governors of this world;" so that when we press men to restitution, we touch them in their interest, which is a very touchy and tender thing; when we tell them that without restitution no man can repent and be saved, they think this to be a very hard saying, and they know not how to bear it.

But certainly it hath all the reason and equity in the world on its side. If it be so hard for them to restore that which is another man's, is it not much harder for him whom thou hast injured, to lose that which is his own? make it thine own case; wouldest thou not think it much harder to have thy right detained from thee by another, than for another to part with that which is not his own?

But I am sensible how little it is that reason will sway with men against their interest; therefore the

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best argument that I can use, will be to satisfy men that, upon a true and just account, it is not so much their interest to retain what they have unjustly got, as to make restitution. And this I shall do, by shewing men that to make restitution is their true interest, both in respect of themselves and of their posterity.

I. In respect to themselves. It is better both in respect of our present condition in this world, and of our future state.

1. In respect of our present condition in this world, and that both in respect of our outward estate, and our inward peace and tranquillity.

(1.) In respect of our outward estate. If we have any belief of the providence of God, that his blessing can prosper an estate, and his curse consume it and make it moulder away, we cannot but judge it highly our interest to clear our estates of injustice by restitution; and by this means to free them from God's curse. For if any of our estate be unjustly gotten, it is enough to draw down God's curse upon all that we have; it is like a moth in our estate, which will insensibly consume it; it is like a secret poison, which will diffuse itself through the whole; like a little land *in capite*, which brings the whole estate into wardship.

Hear how God threatens to blast estates unjustly gotten, (Job xx. 12, &c.) concluding with these words, "This is the portion of a wicked man;" that is, of an unjust man. (Jer. xvii. 11.) "As a partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth riches and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." Men many times live to see the folly of their injustice and oppression, and their estates wither away be-

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fore their eyes: and by the just revenge of God, they are deprived of them in the midst of their days. So that the best way to fix an estate, and to secure it to ourselves, is by restitution to free it from God's curse; and when we have done that, how much soever we may diminish our estate by it, we may look upon ourselves as having a better estate than we had; better, because we have God's blessing with that which remains. If we believe the Bible, we cannot doubt of this. The Spirit of God tells us this from the observation of the wisest men. (Psal. xxxvii. 16.) "A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked." (Prov. xvi. 8.) "Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right."

(2.) In respect of inward peace and tranquillity, it is highly our interest to make restitution. No man can enjoy an estate, that does not enjoy himself; and nothing puts a man more out of the possession of himself, than an unquiet conscience; and there are no kind of sins lie heavier upon a man's conscience, than those of injustice; because they are committed against the clearest natural light, and there is the least natural temptation to them. They have these two great aggravations, that they are sins most against knowledge, and have most of will in them. There needs no revelation to convince men of sins of injustice and oppression; every man hath those principles born with him, which will sufficiently acquaint him that he ought not to be injurious to another. There is nothing that relates to our duty, that a man can know with greater certainty than this, that injustice is a sin. And as it is a sin most against knowledge, so it hath most of will in it. Men are hurried away to other sins by the strong

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and violent propensions of their nature: but no man is inclined, by his temper and constitution, to fraud and oppression: and the less there is of nature in any sin, there is the less of necessity, and consequently it is the more voluntary. Now the greater the aggravations of any sin are, the greater is the guilt; and the greater the guilt is, the more unquiet our consciences will be: so that, if thou have any regard to the interest of thine own peace, if that be considerable to thee, which to wise men is the most valuable thing in the world, do not for a little wealth continue in those sins, which will create perpetual disturbance to thee, and embitter all the pleasures of thy life. Hear how Job describes the condition of the wicked oppressors in the place before cited: (Job xx. 12, &c.) "He shall not rejoice in them, because he hath oppressed; because he hath violently taken away a house which he builded not, surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly:" that is, he shall have no inward peace and contentment in the midst of all his outward enjoyments: but his ill-gotten estate will work in his conscience, and gripe him, as if a man had taken down poison into his belly.

2. But chiefly, in respect of our future estate in another world, it is every man's interest to make restitution. Without repentance we are ruined for ever, and without restitution no repentance. "No unrighteous man hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ." If thou continue in thy fraud and oppression, and carry these sins with thee into another world, they will hang as a millstone about thy neck, and sink thee into eternal ruin. He that wrongeth his brother hateth him, and "he that hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that

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no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John iii. 15; Rom. i. 18.) "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." So that if it be men's interest to escape the wrath of God, it concerns us to make reparation for those injuries which will expose us to it. That is a dreadful text, (James v. 1—4.) "Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten: your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire: ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold! the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." Do not by "detaining the treasures of wickedness, treasure up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath:" do not make yourselves miserable for ever, that you may be rich for a little while: do not for a little silver and gold forfeit the eternal inheritance, which was "not purchased with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of the Son of God:" and if this consideration, which is the weightiest in the world, will not prevail with men, I can only say with the angel, (Rev. xxii. 11.) "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still;" let him continue in his injustice at his peril, and remember what is added at the 12th verse, "Behold! I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be."

II. In respect of our children and posterity, it is greatly our interest to make restitution. God many

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times suffers an estate got by oppression to prosper for a little while: but there is a curse attends it, which descends upon the estate like an incumbrance; and parents many times, when they think they entail an estate, entail poverty upon their children. Job (xx. 10.) speaking of the children of the oppressor, he saith, "His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods." And, (Job xxi. 19.) "God layeth up his iniquity for his children." Thou layest up riches for thy children; and God lays up thine iniquity and injustice for them, the curse that belongs to them. (Hab. ii. 9—11.) "Woe to him that covereth an evil covetousness, or gaineth an evil gain to his house," &c. Thou thoughtest to raise thy family by those ways, but "thou hast consulted shame to thy house." No such effectual way to ruin thy family, as injustice and oppression. As then you would not transmit a curse to your children, and devolve misery upon your family, free your estates from the burden and weight of what is other men's, lest, by God's just judgment and secret providence, that little which you injuriously detain from others, carry away your whole estate to them and their family. God's providence many times makes abundant restitution, when we will not.

Having now endeavoured to satisfy men, that it is their truest interest to make restitution for the injuries they have done to others, it remains only that I should answer an objection or two, which men are apt to make against this duty.

First, Men say they are ashamed to do it. Answer—It is not matter of shame, but of praise and commendation. But it may be thou wilt say, It is matter of shame to have injured another; and this

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is the way to lay open thy shame. Indeed, if the injury were public, the restitution ought to be so too, as the only way to take off the shame of the injury. For thy restitution doth not in this case publish thy shame, but thy honesty: but if the injury was private, thou mayest preserve thy own credit, by concealing thyself; and provided thou do the thing effectually, thou mayest be as prudent, as to the manner of doing it, as thou pleasest.

Secondly, Another objection is, the prejudice it will be to men's estates. But this I have answered already, by shewing that it is more their interest to make restitution, than to continue in the sin. I shall only add, that, as our Saviour reasons in another case, "It is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body should be cast into hell." It is true likewise here, it is profitable for thee, that thou shouldest go a beggar to heaven, rather than that thou shouldest go to hell, laden with the spoils and guilt of rapine and injustice.

Thirdly, The last objection that I shall mention is, disability to make restitution. This, indeed, is something; where nothing is to be had, every man must lose his right: but then remember, that there must be a hearty repentance for the sin; and thy sorrow must be so much greater, by how much thy ability to make restitution is less; and there must be a willing mind, a firm purpose and resolution of doing it, when God shall enable thee, and diligent endeavours to that purpose. Under the law those who were not able to make restitution, were sold for six years, if their service did not make reparation in less time. It is true, indeed, the moderation of the gospel doth not suffer Christians to deal so hardly

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with one another: but if the gospel remit of this rigour, and do not allow Christians to challenge it, we should voluntarily do in effect that which they were forced to; that is, we should use our best endeavours and diligence to put ourselves into a condition of making satisfaction; and we should not look upon any thing beyond the necessary conveniences of life as our own, till we have done it; unless the party injured will recede from his right, in whole or in part. For though the impossibility of the thing do discharge us for the present, yet the obligation still lies upon us to do it, so soon as we are able.

And here it will be proper to consider the case of those who have compounded with their creditors for a small part, whether they be in conscience and equity released from the whole debt. I am loath to lay unnecessary burdens upon men's consciences, therefore I am very tender in resolving such cases: but I ought to have a more tender care of the souls of men, than of their estates: therefore to deal plainly, and to discharge my conscience in this matter, I think such persons do, notwithstanding the composition, stand obliged in equity and conscience for the whole debt, and are bound to discharge it so soon as they can with tolerable convenience. My reason is, because, though they be discharged in law, yet the law does not intend to take off the obligation of conscience or equity, which they are under, but leaves that as it found it. Thus the case stands; men who are in a way of trade, are engaged, by the necessities of their calling, to venture a great part of their estate in other men's hands, and by this means become liable many times to be undone without their own fault; therefore it is usual, when any

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man in a way of trade becomes disabled, for the creditors to make such a composition with him as his estate will bear; and upon this composition to give him a full discharge, so as that they cannot afterwards, by law, require of him the remainder of their debt. Now, though this be a favour to the debtor, yet it is principally intended for the benefit of the creditor; because it being his act, it is to be presumed, that he intended it, as much as may be, for his own advantage; and so it is, for the creditor has as much satisfaction at present as can be had, and the debtor is hereby left in a capacity of recovering himself again by his industry and diligence, which could not be, if he were not fully discharged; for if he were still liable for the rest he would continually be obnoxious to imprisonment, which would render him incapable of following his calling; or if he were at liberty, he could have no credit to enable him to do any thing in his calling; for who would trust a man with any thing, who is liable every moment to have it taken from him? so that the reason of this plenary discharge is this, that men, who are otherwise hopeful, and in a fair probability of recovering themselves, may not be rendered incapable of getting an estate afterwards, whereby they may support themselves, and discharge their debts. Now this discharge being given in order to these ends, it cannot be imagined that it should be intended to defeat them; but it is in all reason to be supposed, that the creditors did not intend to take off the obligation of equity and conscience, only to put the man into a condition of doing something towards the enabling him to discharge his debt. So that unless it were expressed at the composition, that the creditor would never

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expect more from him, upon account of equity and conscience, but did freely forgive him the rest, the contrary whereof is usually done; I say, unless it were thus expressed, there is no reason why the creditor's favour in making a composition should be abused to his prejudice; and why a legal discharge given him on purpose for this reason among others, to put him into a capacity of recovering himself, and giving full satisfaction, should be so interpreted, as to extinguish the equitable right of the creditor to the remainder of his debt.

The second use of this doctrine of restitution should be by way of prevention, that men would take heed of being injurious, and so take away the occasion of restitution, and free themselves from the temptation of not performing so difficult and so unwelcome a duty. It is much easier of the two, not to cozen or oppress thy neighbour, than, after thou hast done it, it will be to bring thyself to make restitution; therefore we should be very careful not to be injurious to any one in any kind; neither immediately by ourselves, nor by aiding and assisting others, by our power and interest, or skill in the law, or by any other way, to do injustice.

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# SERMON CLXXI.

## THE USEFULNESS OF CONSIDERATION, IN ORDER TO REPENTANCE.

*Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!*—DEUT. xxxii. 29.

THIS chapter is called Moses's Song, in which he briefly recounts the various providences of God towards the people of Israel, and the froward carriage of that people towards him.

First, He puts them in mind how God had chosen them for his peculiar people, and had by a signal care and providence conducted them all that tedious journey, for the space of forty years in the wilderness, until he had brought them to the promised land, which they had now begun to take possession of.

And then he foretels, how they would behave themselves after all this mercy and kindness God had shewn to them: (ver. 15.) "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked, and forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation." Upon this, he tells them, God would be extremely displeased with them, and would multiply his judgments upon them: (ver. 19, 20.) "When the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters: and he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in

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whom is no faith." And, (ver. 23.) "I will heap mischief upon them, I will spend mine arrows upon them." And then he enumerates the particular judgments which he would send upon them: nay, he declares he would have utterly consumed them, but that he was loath to give occasion of so much triumph to his and their enemies: (ver. 26, 27.) "I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men; were it not, that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this." And he adds the reason of all this severity; because they were so very stupid and inconsiderate: (ver. 28.) "For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them."

And in the conclusion of all, he represents God, as it were, breaking out into this vehement and affectionate wish, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

"Oh that they were wise, that they understood this!" What is that? *This* may refer to all that went before. Oh that they were wise to consider what God had done for them, and what they had done against him, and what he will do against them, if they continue or renew their former provocations! Oh that they were but duly apprehensive of this, and would lay it seriously to heart!

But from what follows, it seems more particularly to refer to those particular judgments which God had threatened them withal, and which would certainly befal them, if they still continued in their disobedience. "Oh that they were wise, that they un-

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derstood this, that they would consider their latter end!" That is, the sad consequences of these their provocations, that, by the consideration thereof, they might prevent all those evils and calamities, by turning from those sins which would unavoidably bring them upon them.

From the words thus explained, I shall observe these four things:

I. That God doth really and heartily desire the happiness of men, and to prevent their misery and ruin. For the very design of these words is to express this to us, and it is done in a very vehement, and, as I may say, passionate manner.

II. That it is a great point of wisdom, to consider seriously the last issue and consequence of our actions, whither they tend, and what will follow upon them. And therefore wisdom is here described by the consideration of our latter end.

III. That this is an excellent means to prevent that misery which will otherwise befal us. And this is necessarily implied in this wish, that if they would but consider these things, they might be prevented.

IV. That the want of this consideration is the great cause of men's ruin. And this is likewise implied in the words, that one great reason of men's ruin is because they are not so wise, as to consider the fatal issue and consequence of a sinful course. I shall speak briefly to each of these.

I. That God doth really and heartily desire the happiness of men, and to prevent their misery and ruin. To express this to us, God doth put on the vehemency of a human passion: "Oh that they were wise!" &c. The laws of God are a clear evidence of this; because the observance of them tends to

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our happiness. There is no good prince makes laws with any other design, than to promote the public welfare and happiness of his people: and with much more reason may we imagine, that the infinite good God does by all his laws design the happiness of his creatures. And the exhortations of Scripture, by which he enforceth his laws, are yet a greater evidence how earnestly he desires the happiness of his creatures. For it shews that he is concerned for us, when he useth so many arguments to persuade us to our duty, and when he expostulates so vehemently with us for our neglect of it, saying to sinners, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will you die, O house of Israel?" "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life," says our blessed Saviour, with great trouble to see men so obstinately set against their own happiness; and again, "How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" and to satisfy us yet further, that it is his real desire, by our obedience to his laws, to prevent our ruin, God doth frequently in Scripture put on the passions of men, and use all sorts of vehement expressions to this purpose: (Deut. v. 29.) "Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" And, (Psal. lxxxi. 13.) "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries." (Jer. xiii. 27.) "O Israel! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" And, to name but one text more, when our blessed Saviour wept over Jerusalem, how passionately does he wish that "she had



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known in that her day the things that belonged to her peace!"

And if, after all this, we can doubt whether the faithful God means as he says, he hath for our farther assurance, and to put the matter out of all doubt, confirmed his word by an oath: (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" So that if words can be any declaration of a hearty and sincere desire, we have no reason to doubt, but that God does really desire the happiness of men, and would gladly prevent their ruin and destruction.

If any now ask, Why then are not all men happy? Why do they not escape ruin and destruction? And particularly, why the people of Israel, for whom God here makes this wish, did not escape those judgments which were threatened? the prophet shall answer for me, (Hos. xiii. 9.) "O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself." And David, (Psal. lxxxi. 11.) "My people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would none of me." And our blessed Saviour, (Matt. xxiii. 37.) "How often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" and, (John v. 40.) "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." You see what account the Scripture plainly gives of this matter; it rests upon the wills of men, and God hath not thought fit to force happiness upon men, and to make them wise and good whether they will or no. He presents men with such motives, and offers such arguments to their consideration, as are fit to prevail with reasonable men, and is ready to afford them all necessary assistance, if they be not

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wanting to themselves; but if they will not be wise and consider, if they will stand out against all the arguments that God can offer, if they will "receive the grace of God in vain, and resist his blessed Spirit, and reject the counsel of God against themselves," God hath not, in this case, engaged himself to provide any remedy against the obstinacy and perverseness of men, but "their destruction is of themselves," and "their blood shall be upon their own heads." And there is no nicety and intricacy in this matter; but if men will consider Scripture and reason impartially, they will find this to be the plain resolution of the case.

So that no man hath reason either to charge his fault or his punishment upon God; he is "free from the blood of all men," he sincerely desires our happiness; but we wilfully ruin ourselves: and when he tells us that he "desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" that he "would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" that he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" he plainly means as he says, and doth not speak to us with any reserve, or dark distinction between his secret and revealed will; he does not decree one thing and declare another.

And if this be so, no man hath reason to be discouraged from attempting and endeavouring his own happiness, upon a jealousy and surmise that God hath, by any fatal decree, put a bar to it from all eternity; for if he had so absolutely resolved to make the greatest part of mankind miserable, without any respect to their actions in this world, he would never have said, that he desires "that all



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should be saved;" he would not have exhorted all men "to work out their own salvation:" had he taken up any such resolution, he would have declared it to all the world; for he hath power enough in his hands "to do what he pleaseth, and none can resist his will;" so that he did not need to have dissembled the matter, and to have pretended a desire to save men, when he was resolved to ruin them.

This is the first, that God doth really and heartily desire the happiness of men, and to prevent their misery and ruin. I proceed to the

II. Second, That it is a great part of wisdom, to consider seriously the last issue and consequence of our actions, and whither the course of life which we lead does tend, and what will follow upon it. And therefore wisdom is here explained by consideration; "Oh that they were wise, that they would consider their latter end!" that is, what will befal them hereafter, what will be the issue and consequence of all the sins and provocations which they are guilty of.

And this is a principal point and property of wisdom, to look forward, and not only to consider the present pleasure and advantage of any action, but the future consequence of it: and there is no greater argument of an imprudent man, than to gratify himself for the present in the doing of a thing which will turn to his greater prejudice afterwards; especially if the future inconvenience be great and intolerable, as it is in the case we are speaking of. For eternal happiness or misery depends upon the actions of this present life; and according as we behave ourselves in this world, it will go well or ill with us for ever: so that this is a matter of vast importance, and deserves our most serious thoughts;

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and, in matters of mighty consequence, a wise man will take all things into consideration, and look before him as far as he can. And indeed this is the reason why things of great moment are said to be things of consequence, because great things depend and are likely to follow upon them: and then surely that is the greatest concernment, upon which, not only the happiness of this present life, but our happiness to all eternity, does depend; and if the good and bad actions of this life be of that consequence to us, it is fit every man should consider what he does, and whither the course of life he is engaged, or about to engage in, will lead him at last. For this is true wisdom, to look to the end of things, and to think seriously beforehand what is likely to be the event of such an action, of such a course of life. If we serve God faithfully, and do his will, what will be the consequence of that to us in this world and the other; and, on the other hand, if we live wickedly, and allow ourselves in any unlawful and vicious practice, what will be the end of that course.

And to any man that consults the law of his own nature, or the will of God revealed in Scripture, nothing can be plainer than what will be the end of these several ways. God hath plainly told us, and our own consciences will tell us the same, that if we do well we shall be accepted of God, and rewarded by him; but if we do ill, "the end of these things is death, that indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, will be upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but honour, and glory, and peace to every man that doeth good, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel."

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So that God hath given us a plain prospect of the different issues of a virtuous and wicked life, and there wants nothing but consideration to make us to attend to these things, and to lay them seriously to heart. For while men are inconsiderate, they go on stupidly in an evil way, and are not sensible of the danger of their present course, because they do not attend to the consequence of it: but when their eyes are once opened by consideration, they cannot but be sadly apprehensive of the mischief they are running themselves upon. If men would take but a serious and impartial view of their lives and actions; if they would consider the tendency of a sinful course, and whither it will bring them at last; if the vicious and dissolute man would but look about him and consider how many have been ruined in that very way that he is in, how many lie slain and wounded in it; that "it is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death;" the serious thought of this could not but check him in his course, and make him resolve upon a better life. If men were wise, they would consider the consequence of their actions, and upon consideration would resolve upon that which they are convinced is best. I proceed to the

III. Third thing I propounded, which was, that consideration of the consequence of our actions, is an excellent means to prevent the mischiefs which otherwise we should run into. And this is necessarily implied in the wish here in the text, that if we would but consider these things, they might be prevented. For how can any man, who hath any love or regard for himself, any tenderness for his own interest and happiness, see hell and destruction before him, which, if he hold on his evil course, will

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certainly swallow him up, and yet venture to go on in his sins? Can any man that plainly beholds misery hastening towards him like an armed man, and "destruction coming upon him as a whirlwind," think himself unconcerned to prevent it and fly from it? The most dull and stupid creatures will start back upon the sight of present danger. Balaam's ass, when she saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his sword drawn ready to smite her, starts aside, and could not be urged on. Now God hath given us, not only sense to apprehend a present evil, but reason and consideration to look before us, and to discover dangers at a distance, to apprehend them as certainly and with as clear a conviction of the reality of them, as if they threatened us the next moment: and will any considerate man, who hath calculated the dangerous events of sin, and the dreadful effects of God's wrath upon sinners, go on to "provoke the Lord to jealousy, as if he were stronger than he?" It is not to be imagined, but that, if men would seriously consider what sin is, and what shall be the sad portion of sinners hereafter, they would resolve upon a better course. Would any man live in the lusts of the flesh, and of intemperance, or out of covetousness defraud or oppress his neighbour, did he seriously consider that God is the avenger of such, and that, "because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience?"

I should have great hopes of men's repentance and reformation, if they could but once be brought to consideration; for in most men it is not so much a positive disbelief of the truth, as inadvertency and want of consideration, that makes them to go on so securely in a sinful course. Would but men con-

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sider what sin is, and what will be the fearful consequence of it, probably in this world, but most certainly in the other, they could not choose but fly from it as the greatest evil in the world.

And to shew what power and influence consideration will probably have to bring men to repentance, and a change of their lives, I remember to have somewhere met with a very remarkable story, of one that had a son that took bad courses, and would not be reclaimed by all the good counsel his father could give him; at last, coming to his father, who lay upon his death-bed, to beg his blessing, his father, instead of upbraiding him with his bad life, and undutiful carriage toward him, spake kindly to him, and told him, he had but one thing to desire of him, that every day he would retire and spend one quarter of an hour alone by himself; which he promised his father faithfully to do, and make it good. After a while it grew tedious to him, to spend even so little time in such bad and uneasy company, and he began to bethink himself, for what reason his father should so earnestly desire of him to do so odd a thing for his sake, and his mind presently suggested to him, that it was to enforce him to consideration; wisely judging, that if by any means he could but bring him to that, he would soon reform his life, and become a new man. And the thing had its desired effect; for after a little consideration, he took up a firm resolution to change the course of his life, and was true to it all his days. I cannot answer for the truth of the story, but for the moral of it I will; namely, that consideration is one of the best and most likely things in the world, to bring a bad man to a better mind. I now come to the

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IV. Fourth, and last particular, namely, that the want of this consideration is one of the greatest causes of men's ruin. And this likewise is implied in the text; and the reason why God does so vehemently desire that men would be wise and consider, is, because so many are ruined and undone for want of it. This is the desperate folly of mankind, that they seldom think seriously of the consequence of their actions, and least of all such as are of greatest concernment to them, and have the chief influence upon their eternal condition. They do not consider what mischief and inconveniency a wicked life may plunge them into in this world, what trouble and disturbance it may give them when they come to die; what horror and confusion it may fill them withal, when they are leaving this world, and passing into eternity; and what intolerable misery and torment it may bring upon them to all eternity. Did men ponder and lay to heart death and judgment, heaven and hell; and would they but let their thoughts dwell upon these things, it is not credible that the generality of men could lead such profane and impious, such lewd and dissolute, such secure and careless, lives as they do.

Would but a man frequently entertain his mind with such thoughts as these—I must shortly die, and leave this world, and then all the pleasures and enjoyments of it will be to me as if they had never been, only that the remembrance of them, and the ill use I have made of them, will be very bitter and grievous to me; after all, death will transmit me out of this world, into a quite different state and scene of things, into the presence of that great and terrible, that inflexible and impartial Judge, who will "render to every man according to his works;" and then

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all the evils which I have done in this life will rise up in judgment against me, and fill me with everlasting confusion, in that great assembly of men and angels; will banish me from the presence of God, and all the happiness which flows from it, and procure a dreadful sentence of unspeakable misery and torment to be passed upon me, which I can never get reversed, nor yet never be able to stand under the weight of it. If men would but enter into the serious consideration of these things, and pursue these thoughts to some issue and conclusion, they would take up other resolutions; and I verily believe, that the want of this hath ruined more than even infidelity itself. And this I take to be the meaning of that question in the Psalmist, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" that is, no consideration? intimating, that if they had, they would do better.

All that now remains is, to persuade men to apply their hearts to this piece of wisdom, to look before them, and to think seriously of the consequence of their actions, what will be the final issue of that course of life they are engaged in; and if they continue in it, what will become of them hereafter, what will become of them for ever.

And here I might apply this text, as God here does to the people of Israel, to the public condition of the nation, which is not so very unlike to that of the people of Israel; for God seems to have chosen this nation for his more peculiar people, and hath exercised a very particular providence towards us, in conducting us through that wilderness of confusion, in which we have been wandering for the space of above forty years; and when things were come unto the last extremity, and we seemed to stand

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upon the very brink of ruin, then (as it is said of the people of Israel, ver. 36, of this chapter), "God repented himself for his servants, when he saw their power was gone:" that is, that they were utterly unable to help themselves, and to work their own deliverance. And it may be said of us, as Moses does of that people, (chap. xxxiii. 29.) "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!" Never did any nation struggle with, and get through, so many, and so great difficulties, as we have several times done.

And I fear we have behaved ourselves towards God not much better than the people of Israel did; but, like Jeshurun, after many deliverances and great mercies, "have waxed fat and kicked, have forsaken the God that made us, and little esteemed the Rock of our salvation;" by which we have "provoked the Lord to jealousy," and have, as it were, forced him to multiply his judgments, and to spend his arrows upon us, "and to hide his face from us, to see what our end will be:" so that we have reason to fear, that God would have brought utter ruin and destruction upon us, and "scattered us into corners, and made the remembrance of us to have ceased from among men, had he not feared the wrath of the enemy, and lest the adversaries should have behaved themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this," that is, lest they should ascribe this just vengeance of God upon a sinful and unthankful nation, to the goodness and righteousness of their own cause, and to the favour and assistance of the idols and false gods whom they worshipped, to the patronage and aid of the Virgin

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Mary, and the saints; to whom, contrary to the will and command of the true God, they had offered up so many prayers and vows, and paid the greatest part of their religious worship. But "the Lord hath shewn himself greater than all gods, and in the things wherein they dealt proudly, that he is above them: for our Rock is not as their rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

And we have been too like the people of Israel in other respects also; so fickle and inconstant, that after great deliverances we are presently apt to murmur and be discontented, to grow sick of our own happiness, and "to turn back in our hearts into Egypt;" so that God may complain of us, as he does of his people Israel, that nothing that he could do, would bring them to consideration, and make them better, neither his mercies nor his judgments: (Isa. i. 2, 3.) "Hear, O heaven! and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider." And so likewise he complains that his judgments had no effect upon them; (ver. 5.) "Why should ye be smitten any more? Ye will revolt more and more." Well, therefore, may it be said of us, as it was of them in the verse before the text, "They are a nation void of knowledge, neither is there any understanding in them." And the wish that follows in the text, is as seasonable for us as it was for them, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

And by parity of reason, this may likewise be applied to particular persons, and to persuade every

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one of us to a serious consideration of the final issue and consequence of our actions. I will only offer these two arguments:

1. That consideration is the proper act of reasonable creatures, and that whereby we shew ourselves men. So the prophet intimates, (Isa. xlvi. 8.) "Remember this, and shew yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors!" That is, consider it well, think of it again and again, ye that run on so furiously in a sinful course, what the end and issue of these things will be. If ye do not do this, you do not shew yourselves men, you do not act like reasonable creatures, to whom it is peculiar to propose to themselves some end and design of their actions; but rather like brute creatures, which have no understanding, and act only by a natural instinct, without any consideration of the end of their actions, or of the means conducing to it.

2. Whether we consider it or not, our latter end will come; and all those dismal consequences of a sinful course, which God hath so plainly threatened, and our own consciences do so much dread, will certainly overtake us at last; and we cannot, by not thinking of these things, ever prevent or avoid them. Death will come, and after that the judgment, and an irreversible doom will pass upon us according to all the evil that we have done, and all the good that we have neglected to do in this life, under the heavy weight and pressure whereof we must lie groaning, and bewailing ourselves to everlasting ages.

God now exerciseth his mercy, and patience, and long-suffering towards us, in expectation of our amendment; he reprieves us on purpose that we

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may repent, and in hopes that we will at last consider and grow wiser; for "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:" but if we will trifle away this day of God's grace and patience, if we will not consider and bethink ourselves, there is another day that will certainly come, "That great and terrible day of the Lord, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."

"Seeing then all these things shall be," let us consider seriously "what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness, waiting for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God;" to whom be glory now and for ever.

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# SERMON CLXXII.

## THE DANGER OF IMPENITENCE WHERE THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED.

*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.*—MATT. xi. 21, 22.

AFTER our blessed Saviour had instructed, and sent forth his disciples, he himself went abroad to preach unto the cities of Israel; particularly he spent much time in the cities of Galilee, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and Capernaum, preaching the gospel to them, and working many and great miracles among them; but with little or no success: which was the cause of his denouncing this terrible woe against them; (ver. 20.) "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin!" &c.

In which words our Saviour declares the sad and miserable condition of those two cities, Chorazin and Bethsaida, which had neglected such an opportunity, and resisted and withstood such means of repentance, as would have effectually reclaimed the most wicked cities and people that can be instanced in any age, Tyre, and Sidon, and Sodom; and therefore he tells them, that their condition was much

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worse, and that they should fall under a heavier sentence at the day of judgment, than the people of those cities whom they had always looked upon as the greatest sinners that ever were in the world. This is the plain meaning of the words in general; but yet there are some difficulties in them, which I shall endeavour to clear, and then proceed to raise such observations from them, as may be instructive and useful to us.

The difficulties are these:

I. What repentance is here spoken of; whether an external repentance, in show and appearance only, or an inward, and real, and sincere repentance.

II. In what sense it is said, that "Tyre and Sidon would have repented."

III. What is meant by their "would have repented long ago."

IV. How this assertion of our Saviour's, that miracles would have converted Tyre and Sidon, is reconcileable with that other saying of his, (Luke xvi. 31.) in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, that "those who believed not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

I. What repentance is here spoken of; whether a mere external and hypocritical repentance in show and appearance only, or an inward, and real, and sincere repentance.

The reason of this doubt depends upon the different theories of divines, about the sufficiency of grace accompanying the outward means of repentance, and whether an irresistible degree of God's grace be necessary to repentance; for they who deny sufficient grace to accompany the outward means of repentance, and assert an irresistible de-

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gree of God's grace necessary to repentance, are forced to say that our Saviour here speaks of a mere external repentance; because if he spake of an inward and sincere repentance, then it must be granted, that sufficient inward grace did accompany the miracles that were wrought in Chorazin and Bethsaida, to bring men to repentance; because what was afforded to them, would have brought Tyre and Sidon to repentance. And that which would have effected a thing, cannot be denied to be sufficient: so that unless our Saviour here speaks of a mere external repentance, either the outward means of repentance, as preaching and miracles, must be granted to be sufficient to bring men to repentance, without the inward operation of God's grace upon the minds of men; or else a sufficient degree of God's grace must be acknowledged to accompany the outward means of repentance. Again, if an irresistible degree of grace be necessary to true repentance, it is plain, Chorazin and Bethsaida had it not, because they did not repent; and yet, without this, Tyre and Sidon could not sincerely have repented: therefore our Saviour here must speak of a mere external repentance. Thus some argue, as they do likewise concerning the repentance of Nineveh, making that also to be merely external, because they are loath to allow true repentance to heathens.

But it seems very plain, that our Saviour does speak of an inward, and true, and sincere repentance; and therefore, the doctrines that will not admit this, are not true. For our Saviour speaks of the same kind of repentance, that he upbraideth them with the want of, in the verse before the text. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most



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of his mighty works were done, because they repented not;" that is, because they were not brought to a sincere repentance, by his preaching, which was confirmed by such great miracles. It is true, indeed, he mentions the outward signs and expressions of repentance, when he says, "they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes;" but not as excluding inward and real repentance, but supposing it, as is evident from what is said in the next verse, "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment, than for you:" for though an external and hypocritical repentance may prevail with God to put off temporal judgments, yet surely it will be but a very small, if any, mitigation of our condemnation at the day of judgment: so that the repentance here spoken of cannot, without great violence to the scope and design of our Saviour's argument, be understood only of an external shew and appearance of repentance.

II. The next difficulty to be cleared is, in what sense it is here said, that "if the mighty works which were done" by our Saviour among the Jews, "had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented."

Some, to avoid the inconvenience which they apprehend to be in the more strict and literal sense of the words, look upon them as hyperbolical: as we say, such a thing would move a stone, or the like, when we would express something to be very sad and grievous; so here, to aggravate the impenitence of the Jews, our Saviour says, that they resisted those means of repentance, which one would think should almost have prevailed upon the greatest and most obdurate sinners that ever were; but not intending to affirm any such thing.

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But there is no colour for this, if we consider that our Saviour reasons from the supposition of such a thing, that therefore the case of Tyre and Sidon would really be "more tolerable at the day of judgment" than theirs; because they would have repented, but the Jews did not.

Others, perhaps, understand the words too strictly, as if our Saviour had spoken according to what he certainly foreknew would have happened to the people of Tyre and Sidon, if such miracles had been wrought among them. And no doubt but, in that case, God did certainly know what they would have done; but yet I should rather choose to understand the words as spoken popularly, according to what in all human appearance and probability would have happened, if such external means of repentance, accompanied with an ordinary grace of God, had been afforded to them of Tyre and Sidon. And thus the old Latin interpreter seems to have understood the next words: "If the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, ἔμειναν ἄν, *forte mansissent*, "it would perhaps have remained to this day—in all likelihood it had continued till now." Much the same with that passage of the prophet: (Ezek. iii. 5; 6.) "Thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech, and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel: surely had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee;" that is, in all probability they would; there is little doubt to be made of the contrary. And this is sufficient foundation for our Saviour's reasoning afterwards, that "it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for them." And if we may judge what they would have done before, by what they did afterward, there is more than



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probability for it: for we read in the 21st chapter of the Acts, (ver. 3. 7.) that the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon received the gospel, and kindly entertained St. Paul, when the Jews rejected them both. The

III. Third thing to be cleared is, what is meant by long ago; "they would have repented long ago."

Some understand this, as if our Saviour had said, they would not have stood out so long against so much preaching, and so many miracles; but would at first have repented, long before our Saviour gave over Chorazin and Bethsaida for obstinate and incorrigible sinners; they would not only have repented at last, but much sooner, and without so much ado.

But this does not seem to be the meaning of the words; but our Saviour seems to refer to those ancient times, long ago, when the prophets denounced judgments against Tyre and Sidon, particularly the prophet Ezekiel; and to say, that if in those days the preaching of that prophet had been accompanied with such miracles as our Saviour wrought in the cities of Galilee, Tyre and Sidon would in those days have repented.

The last and greatest difficulty of all is, how this assertion of our Saviour, that miracles would have converted Tyre and Sidon, is reconcileable with that discourse of our Saviour's (Luke xvi.) in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, that those who would not believe Moses and the prophets, would not have been persuaded, though one had rose from the dead.

The true answer to which difficulty, in short, is this: that when our Saviour says, "if they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be

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persuaded though one rose from the dead:" he does not hereby weaken the force of miracles, or their aptness to convince men, and bring them to repentance; but rather confirm it: because Moses and the prophets had the attestation of many and great miracles; and therefore there was no reason to think, that they who would not believe the writings and doctrine of Moses and the prophets, which had the confirmation of so many miracles, and was owned by themselves to have so, should be wrought upon by one particular miracle—the coming of one from the dead, and speaking unto them: or, however this might move and astonish them, for the present, yet it was not likely that the grace of God should concur with such an extraordinary means, to render it effectual to their conversion and repentance, who had wilfully despised, and obstinately rejected, that which had a much greater confirmation than the discourse of a man risen from the dead, and was appointed by God for the ordinary and standing means of bringing men to repentance. So that our Saviour might, with reason enough, pronounce that Tyre and Sidon, who never had a standing revelation of God to bring them to repentance, nor had rejected it, would, upon miracles extraordinarily wrought among them, have repented; and yet deny it elsewhere to be likely, that they who rejected a standing revelation of God, confirmed by miracles, which called them to repentance, would probably be brought to repentance by a particular miracle; or that God should afford his grace to make it effectual for their repentance and salvation.

The words being thus cleared, I come now to raise such observations from them, as may be instructive and useful to us.

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I. I observe from this discourse of our Saviour, that miracles are of great force and efficacy to bring men to repentance.

This our Saviour's discourse here supposeth; otherwise their impenitence had not been so criminal and inexcusable upon that account, that such mighty works had been done among them, as would probably have prevailed upon some of the worst people that had been in the world; for such were the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, guilty of great covetousness and fraud, pride and luxury, the usual sins of places of great traffic and commerce: and such, to be sure, was Sodom; and yet our Saviour tells us, that the miracles which he had wrought in the cities of Israel, would, in all probability, have brought those great sinners to repentance; namely, by bringing them to faith, and convincing them of the truth and divinity of that doctrine which he preached unto them, and which contains such powerful arguments to repentance and amendment of life.

II. I observe, likewise, from our Saviour's discourse, that God is not always obliged to work miracles for the conversion of sinners. It is great goodness in him to afford sufficient means of repentance to men, as he did to Tyre and Sidon, in calling them to repentance by his prophet; though such miracles were not wrought among them, as God thought fit to accompany our Saviour's preaching withal.

This I observe, to prevent a kind of bold and saucy objection, which some would perhaps be apt to make: If Tyre and Sidon would have repented, had such miracles been wrought among them, as our Saviour wrought in Chorazin and Bethsaida,

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why were they not wrought, that they might have repented? To which it is sufficient answer to say, that God is not obliged to do all that is possible to be done, to reclaim men from their sins; he is not obliged to overpower their wills, and to work irresistibly upon their minds, which he can easily do; he is not obliged to work miracles for every particular man's conviction; nor where he vouchsafeth to do this, is he obliged always to work the greatest and most convincing miracles; his goodness will not suffer him to omit what is necessary and sufficient to bring men to repentance and happiness; nay, beyond this he many times does more; but it is sufficient to vindicate the justice and goodness of God, that he is not wanting to us, in affording the means necessary to reclaim us from our sins, and to bring us to goodness. That which is properly our part, is to make use of those means which God affords us to become better, and not to prescribe to him how much he should do for us; to be thankful that he hath done so much, and not to find fault with him for having done no more.

III. I observe farther, from our Saviour's discourse, that the external means of repentance which God affords to men, do suppose an inward grace of God accompanying them, sufficiently enabling men to repent, if it be not their own fault; I say, a sufficient grace of God accompanying the outward means of repentance, till, by our wilful and obstinate neglect and resistance, and opposition of this grace, we provoke God to withdraw it from the means, or else to withdraw both the grace and the means from us: otherwise impenitence, after such external means afforded, would be no new and special fault. For if the concurrence of God's grace with the out-

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ward means be necessary to work repentance, then the impenitence of those, to whom this grace is not afforded, which yet is necessary to repentance, is neither any new sin, nor any new aggravation of their former impenitence. For no man can imagine that the just God will charge men with new guilt, and increase their condemnation, for remaining impenitent in such circumstances in which it is impossible for them to repent.

IV. I observe from this discourse of our Saviour's, that an irresistible degree of grace is not necessary to repentance, nor commonly afforded to those who do repent. God may, where he pleaseth, without injury to any man, overpower his will, and stop him in his course, and hinder him from making himself miserable, and by an irresistible light convince him of his error and the evil of his ways, and bring him to a better mind: but this God seldom does, and, when he does it, it is very probable it is not so much for their own sakes, as to make them instruments of good to others. Thus by a secret but overpowering influence he overruled the disciples to follow our Saviour, and to leave their callings and relations, and all their temporal concernments to do it. But one of the most remarkable examples of this extraordinary grace of God is St. Paul, who was violently stopped in his course of persecuting the Christians, and convinced of his sin, and brought over to Christianity, in a very extraordinary and forcible manner. And of this miraculous and extraordinary conversion, God himself gives this account; that he was "a chosen vessel unto him, to bear his name before the gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel;" (Acts ix. 15.) And St. Paul tells us, (Gal. i. 15, 16.) that for

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this end God had separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by his grace, and revealed his Son to him, in that extraordinary manner, that he might preach among the heathen.

But generally God does not bring men thus to repentance; nor is it necessary he should. For if an irresistible degree of grace were always necessary to bring men to repentance, there could be no difference between the impenitence of Chorazin and Bethsaida, and of Tyre and Sidon. For, according to this doctrine of the necessity of irresistible grace to the conversion of every man, it is evident, that Tyre and Sidon neither could nor would have repented, without an irresistible degree of God's grace accompanying the outward means of repentance which he afforded to them; because such a degree of grace is necessary to repentance, and, without it, it is impossible for any man to repent. But then it is as plain, on the contrary, that if Chorazin and Bethsaida had had the same irresistible degree of God's grace, together with the outward means of repentance, afforded to them, that they would have repented as certainly as Tyre and Sidon. Where then is the reason of upbraiding the impenitence of the one more than of the other? Where the aggravation of the one's guilt above the other? Where the justice of punishing the impenitence of Chorazin and Bethsaida more than theirs of Tyre and Sidon? For, upon this supposition, they must either have repented both alike, or have been both equally impenitent. The sum of what I have said is this: that if no man does, nor can repent, without such a degree of God's grace as cannot be resisted, no man's repentance is commendable, nor is one man's impenitence more blameable than another's; Chorazin

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and Bethsaida can be in no more fault for continuing impenitent, than Tyre and Sidon were. For either this irresistible grace is afforded to men or not: if it be, their repentance is necessary, and they cannot help it; if it be not, their repentance is impossible, and consequently, their impenitence is necessary, and they cannot help it neither.

V. I observe from the main scope of our Saviour's discourse, that the sins and impenitence of men receive their aggravation, and consequently shall have their punishment proportionable, to the opportunities and means of repentance which those persons have enjoyed and neglected.

For what is here said of miracles, is by equality of reason likewise true of all other advantages and means of repentance and salvation. The reason why miracles will be such an aggravation of the condemnation of men is, because they are so proper and powerful a means to convince them of the truth and divinity of that doctrine which calls them to repentance. So that all those means which God affords to us of the knowledge of our duty, of conviction of the evil and danger of a sinful course, are so many helps and motives to repentance, and consequently will prove so many aggravations of our sin and punishment, if we continue impenitent. The

VI. Sixth and last observation, and which naturally follows from the former, is this: that the case of those, who are impenitent under the gospel, is of all others the most dangerous, and their damnation shall be heaviest and most severe.

And this brings the case of these cities here in the text home to ourselves. For in truth there is no material difference between the case of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, and of ourselves in

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this city and nation, who enjoy the clear light of the gospel, with all the freedom and all the advantages that any people ever did. The mercies of God to this nation have been very great, especially in bringing us out of that darkness and superstition, which covered this western part of the world; in rescuing us from that great corruption and degeneracy of the Christian religion, which prevailed among us, by so early and so regular a reformation; and in continuing so long this great blessing to us. The judgments of God have been likewise very great upon us for our sins. "God hath manifested himself by terrible things in righteousness;" our eyes have seen many and dismal calamities in the space of a few years, which call loudly upon us to repent and turn to God. God hath afforded us the most effectual means of repentance, and hath taken the most effectual course of bringing us to it. And though our blessed Saviour does not speak to us in person, nor do we at this day see miracles wrought among us, as the Jews did; yet we have the doctrine which our blessed Saviour preached faithfully transmitted to us, and a credible relation of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of that doctrine, and many other arguments to persuade us of the truth of it, which those to whom our Saviour spake had not, nor could not then have, taken from the accomplishing of our Saviour's predictions, after his death; the speedy propagation and wonderful success of this doctrine in the world, by weak and inconsiderable means, against all the power and opposition of the world; the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, according to our Saviour's prophecy; besides many more that might be mentioned. And, which is a mighty advantage to us, we are free

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from those prejudices against the person of our Saviour and his doctrine, which the Jews, by the reverence which they bear to their rulers and teachers, were generally possessed withal; we are brought up in the belief of it, and have drunk it in by education; and, if we believe it, as we all profess to do, we have all the obligation and all the arguments to repentance, which the Jews could possibly have from the miracles which they saw: for they were means of repentance to them no otherwise than as they brought them to the belief of our Saviour's doctrine, which called them to repentance.

So that if we continue impenitent, the same woe is denounced against us that is against Chorazin and Bethsaida; and we may be said, with Capernaum, to be lifted up to heaven, by the enjoyment of the most excellent means and advantages of salvation, that any people ever had; which, if we neglect, and still continue wicked and impenitent under them, we may justly fear, that with them we shall be thrown down to hell, and have our place in the lowest part of that dismal dungeon, and in the very centre of that fiery furnace.

Never was there greater cause to upbraid the impenitence of any people, than of us, considering the means and opportunities which we enjoy; and never had any greater reason to fear a severer doom, than we have. Impenitence in a heathen is a great sin; else how should God judge the world? But God takes no notice of that, in comparison of the impenitence of Christians, who enjoy the gospel, and are convinced of the truth, and upon the greatest reason in the world profess to believe it. We Christians have all the obligations to repentance, that reason and revelation, nature and grace, can lay upon us.

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Art thou convinced that thou hast sinned, and done that which is contrary to thy duty, and thereby provoked the wrath of God, and incensed his justice against thee? As thou art a man, and upon the stock of natural principles, thou art obliged to repentance. The same light of reason which discovers to thee the errors of thy life, and challengeth thee for thy impiety and intemperance, for thy injustice and oppression, for thy pride and passion; the same natural conscience which accuseth thee of any miscarriages, does oblige thee to be sorry for them, "to turn from thy evil ways, and to break off thy sins by repentance." For nothing can be more unreasonable, than for a man to know a fault, and yet not think himself bound to be sorry for it; to be convinced of the evil of his ways, and not to think himself obliged by that very conviction, to turn from it, and forsake it. If there be any such thing as a natural law written in men's hearts, which the apostle tells us the heathens had, it is impossible to imagine, but that the law which obliges men not to transgress, should oblige them to repentance in case of transgression. And this every man in the world is bound to, though he had never seen the Bible, nor heard of the name of Christ. And the revelation of the gospel doth not supersede this obligation, but adds new strength and force to it: and by how much this duty of repentance is more clearly revealed by our blessed Saviour in the gospel; by how much the arguments which the gospel useth to persuade men, and encourage them to repentance, are greater and more powerful—by so much is the impenitence of those who live under the gospel the more inexcusable.

Had we only some faint hopes of God's mercy, a

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doubtful opinion and weak persuasion of the rewards and punishments of another world; yet we have a law within us, which, upon the probability of these considerations, would oblige us to repentance. Indeed, if men were assured upon good grounds, that there would be no future rewards and punishments; then the sanction of the law were gone, and it would lose its force and obligation: or if we did despair of the mercy of God, and had good reason to think repentance impossible, or that it would do us no good; in that case there would be no sufficient motive and argument to repentance: for no man can return to his duty, without returning to the love of God and goodness; and no man can return to the love of God, who believes that he bears an implacable hatred against him, and is resolved to make him miserable for ever. During this persuasion, no man can repent. And this seems to be the reason, why the devils continue impenitent.

But the heathens were not without hopes of God's mercy, and upon those small hopes which they had, they encouraged themselves into repentance; as you may see in the instance of the Ninevites. "Let them turn every one from his evil ways, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah iii. 8, 9.) But if we, who have the clearest discoveries, and the highest assurance of this, who profess to believe that God hath declared himself placable to all mankind, that "he is in Christ reconciling the world to himself," and that upon our repentance "he will not impute our sins to us;" if we, to whom "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," and to whom

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"life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel;" if, after all this, we still go on in an impenitent course, what shall we be able to plead in excuse of ourselves at that great day? "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment" against such an impenitent generation, "and condemn it; because they repented" upon the terror of lighter threatenings, and upon the encouragement of weaker hopes.

And therefore it concerns us, who call ourselves Christians, and enjoy the clear revelation of the gospel, to look about us, and take heed how we continue in an evil course. For if we remain impenitent, after all the arguments which the gospel, superadded to the light of nature, affords to us to bring us to repentance, it shall not only "be more tolerable for the men of Nineveh," but "for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah," the most wicked and impenitent heathens, "at the day of judgment, than for us." For, because we have stronger arguments, and more powerful encouragements to repentance, than they had, if we do not repent, we shall meet a heavier doom, and a fiercer damnation. The heathen world had many excuses to plead for themselves, which we have not. "The times of that ignorance God winked at: but now commands all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

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# SERMON CLXXIII.

## OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, AS DISCOVERED BY NATURE, AND BY REVELATION.

*But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*—2 TIM. i. 10.

THE design of the apostle in these two Epistles to Timothy, is to direct him how he ought to demean himself, in the office which he bore in the church, which he does in the First Epistle: and to encourage him in his work; which he does here in the Second; in which, after his usual salutation, he endeavours to arm him against the fear of those persecutions, and the shame of those reproaches, which would probably attend him in the work of the gospel: (ver. 8.) "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God, who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling:" as if he had said, The God whom thou serves in this employment, and by whose power thou art strengthened, is he that "hath saved and called us with a holy calling;" that is, it is he who, by Jesus Christ, hath brought salvation to us, and called us to this holy profession; "not according to our works," that is, not that we, by any thing that we have done, have deserved this at his hand, "but according to his

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own purpose and grace," that is, according to his own gracious purpose, "which was given in Christ before the world began;" that is, which from all eternity he decreed and determined to accomplish by Jesus Christ: "but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ;" that is, which gracious purpose of his is now clearly discovered, by our Saviour Jesus Christ's coming into the world, "who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Which words express to us two happy effects of Christ's appearance: first, the abolishing of death; and, secondly, the bringing of "life and immortality to light." In the handling of these words, I shall,

First, Open to you the meaning of the several expressions in the text.

Secondly, Shew what our Saviour Jesus Christ did towards the abolishing of death, and bringing to light life and immortality.

For the first, I shall shew,

I. What is here meant by "the appearing of Jesus Christ."

II. What by the abolishing of death.

III. What by bringing to light life and immortality.

I. What is here meant by "the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ." The Scripture useth several phrases to express this thing to us. As it was the gracious design of God the Father, so it is called the giving of his Son, or sending him into the world. (John iii. 16.) "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son." (Gal. iv. 4.) "In the fulness of time God sent his Son."



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As it was the voluntary undertaking of God the Son, so it is called his coming into the world. In relation to his incarnation, whereby he was made visible to us in his body, and likewise in reference to the obscure promises, and prophecies, and types of the Old Testament, it is called his manifestation, or appearance. So the apostle expresseth it, (1 John iii. 5.) "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins;" by which we are to understand primarily his incarnation, his appearing in our nature, whereby he became visible to us. As he was God, he could not appear to us, "dwelling in light and glory, not to be approached" by us in this state of mortality, and therefore he clothed himself in flesh, that he might appear and become manifest to us.

I say, by his appearing, we are primarily to understand his incarnation: yet not only that, but likewise all that was consequent upon this, the actions of his life, and his death and resurrection; because all these concur to the producing of these happy effects mentioned in the text.

II. What is meant by the abolishing of death. By this we are not to understand that Christ, by his appearance, hath rooted death out of the world, so that men are no longer subject to it. For we see that even good men, and those who are partakers of the benefits of Christ's death, are still subject to the common law of mortality; but this expression, of Christ's having abolished death, signifies the conquest and victory which Christ hath gained over death in his own person, in that after he was dead, and laid in his grave, he rose again from the dead, he freed himself from the bands of death, and broke loose from the fetters of it, they not being able to

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hold him, as the expression is; (Acts ii. 24.) and consequently hath, by this victory over it, given us an assurance of a resurrection to a better life. For since Christ hath abolished death, and triumphed over it, and thereby over the powers of darkness; (for so the apostle tells us, that by his death, and that which followed it, his resurrection from the dead, "he hath destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil:" the devil, he contributed all he could to the death of Christ, by tempting Judas to betray him, and engaging all his instruments in the procuring of it; as he had before brought in death into the world, by tempting the first man to sin, upon which death ensued; thus far he prevailed, and thought his kingdom was safe, having procured the death of him who was so great an enemy to it; but Christ, by rising from the dead, defeats the devil of his design, and plainly conquers him, who had arrogated to himself the power of death;) I say, since Christ hath thus vanquished death, and triumphed over it, and him that had the power of it, death hath lost its dominion, and Christ hath taken the whole power and disposal of it; as you find, Rev. i. 18. "I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death." Now Christ hath not only thus conquered death for himself, but likewise for all those who believe on him; so that death shall not be able to keep them for ever under its power: but Christ, by the same power whereby he raised up himself from the dead, will also "quicken our mortal bodies," and raise them up to a new life; for he keeps "the keys of hell and death;" and, as a reward of his sufferings and submission to death, he hath power conferred upon him, to give eternal



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life to as many as he pleases. In this sense, death, though it be not quite chased out of the world, yet it is virtually and in effect abolished by the appearance of Jesus Christ, having, in a great measure, lost its power and dominion; and since Christ hath assured us of a final rescue from it, the power of it is rendered insignificant and inconsiderable, and the sting and terror of it is taken away. So the apostle tells us in the forementioned place, (Heb. ii. 14, 15.) that Christ having, "by death, destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, he hath delivered those who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage." And not only the power and terror of death is, for the present, in a great measure, taken away; but it shall at last be utterly destroyed. So the apostle tells us; (1 Cor. xv. 26.) "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death;" which makes the apostle, in the latter end of this chapter, to break forth into that triumph: (ver. 54, 55.) "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

III. What is here meant by bringing "life and immortality to light." Life and immortality is here by a frequent Hebraism put for immortal life; as also, immediately before the text, you find purpose and grace, put for God's gracious purpose. The phrase of bringing to light, is spoken of things which were before either wholly, or in a great measure hid, either were not at all discovered before, or not so clearly. Now, because the heathens, by the light of nature, had some probable conjectures and

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hopes concerning another life after this, they were in some measure persuaded, that when men died they were not wholly extinguished, but did pass into another world, and did there receive rewards suited to their carriage and demeanour in this life; and because the Jews also, before Christ, had these natural suggestions and hopes strengthened and confirmed by revelations, which God made unto them under the Old Testament—therefore we cannot understand this phrase of Christ's bringing immortal life to light absolutely, as if it were wholly a new discovery, which the world had no apprehension of before; but only comparatively, as a thing which was now rendered, by the coming of Christ into the world, incomparably more evident and manifest. *Quicquid enim philosophi, quicquid rabini ea de re dicunt, tenebræ sunt, si ad evangelii lucem comparentur:* "Whatever the philosophers, whatever the rabbins, say of this matter, is but darkness, compared to the clear light and revelation of the gospel." I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed; viz. To shew what Christ's coming into the world hath done towards the abolishing of death, and the bringing of "life and immortality to light." I shall speak distinctly to these two:

I. What Christ's appearance and coming into the world hath done towards the abolishing of death, or how death is abolished by the appearance of Christ. I have already shewn in the explication, that this phrase, the abolishing of death, signifies the conquest which he made over death in his own person for himself; the fruit of which victory redounds to us. For in that Christ, by his Divine power, did conquer it, and set himself free from the

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bands of it, this shews that the power of it is now brought into other hands, that "Christ hath the keys of hell and death;" so that though the devil, by tempting to sin, brought death into the world, yet it shall not be in his power to keep men always under the power of it; and hereby the terror of this great enemy is in a good measure taken away, and he shall at last be totally destroyed, by the same hand that hath already given him his mortal wound.

Now this is said to be done by the appearing of Jesus Christ, forasmuch as, by his coming into the world, and taking our nature upon him, he became capable of encountering this enemy, and overcoming him, in such a manner, as might give us assurance of a final victory over it, and for the present comfort and encourage us against the fears of it. For,

1. By taking our nature upon him, he became subject to the frailties and miseries of mortality, and liable to the suffering of death, by which expiation of sin was made. Sin was the cause of death. So the apostle tells us; "By man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so that death came upon all." Now the way to cure this malady which was come upon our nature, and to remove this great mischief which was come into the world, is by taking away the meritorious cause of it, which is the guilt of sin. Now this Christ hath taken away by his death. Christ, that he might abolish death, hath appeared for the abolition of sin. So the apostle tells us; (Heb. ix. 26—28.) "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," εἰς ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας, "for the abolishing of sin;" and to shew that this was intended as a remedy of the great mischief and inconvenience of mortality, which sin had brought

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upon mankind, the apostle immediately adds, in the next verse, that "as it is appointed unto all men once to die, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;" and by his means the sting of death is taken away, and death in effect conquered; the consideration of which makes the apostle break out into that thankful triumph, (1 Cor. xv. 55—57.) "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. As Christ, by taking our nature upon him, became capable of suffering death, and thereby making expiation for sin; so by dying he became capable of rising again from the dead, whereby he hath gained a perfect victory and conquest over death and the powers of darkness. And this account the apostle gives us of Christ's taking our nature upon him, as being one of the principal ends and designs of it: (Heb. ii. 14—16.) "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" that is, that, by taking our nature upon him, he might be capable of encountering this enemy, that is, of encountering death in his own territories, and beating him in his own quarters; and by rising out of his grave, he might give us full and comfortable assurance of the possibility of being rescued from the power of the grave, and recovered out of the jaws of death. And therefore the wisdom of God pitched upon this way, as that which was most fit and proper to encourage and bear us up against the terrors of this enemy; and by giving us a lively instance and example of a

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victory over death, achieved by one clothed with mortality like ourselves, "we might have strong consolation and good hope through grace," and might be fully assured that he, who hath conquered this enemy for himself, was able also to conquer him for us, and to deliver us from the grave. Therefore the apostle reasons from the fitness and suitableness of this dispensation, as if no other argument could have been so proper to arm us against the fears of death, and to satisfy us that we should not always be held under the power of it; "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who through the fear of death," &c. The force of which argument is this: that seeing men are of a mortal nature (for that he means by being "partakers of flesh and blood,") nothing can be a greater comfort to us against the fears of death, than to see death conquered by flesh and blood, by one of the same nature with ourselves. Therefore the apostle adds, (ver. 16.) "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." If he had assumed the angelical nature, which is immortal, this would not have been so sensible a conviction to us of the possibility of it, as to have a lively instance and example presented us, of one in our nature conquering death, and triumphing over the grave. I proceed to the

II. Second thing, What Christ hath done towards the bringing of "life and immortality to light." And because I told you that this is comparatively spoken, and signifies to us a greater degree of evidence, and a firmer assurance given us by the Christian religion,

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than the world had before, therefore it will be requisite to inquire into these two things:

First, What assurance men had or might have had of the immortality of the soul and a future state, before the coming of Christ into the world, and the revelation of the gospel.

Secondly, What greater evidence, and what higher degree of assurance, the gospel now gives us of immortal life; what greater arguments this new revelation and discovery of God to the world doth furnish us with, to persuade us of this matter, than the world was acquainted withal before.

First, What assurance men had or might have had of the immortality of the soul, and consequently of a future state, before the revelation of the gospel by Christ's coming into the world. And here are two things distinctly to be considered.

First, What arguments natural reason doth furnish us withal to persuade us of this principle, that our souls are immortal, and that there is another state remains for men after this life.

Secondly, What assurance *de facto* the world had of this principle, before Christ's coming into the world: what the heathens, and what the Jews, had. The reason why I shall speak to these distinctly, is, because they are two very different inquiries—what assurance men might have had from the principles of natural reason concerning this matter, and what assurance they had *de facto*. I begin with the

First, What arguments natural reason doth furnish us withal to persuade us to this principle, that our souls are immortal, and consequently that another state remains for men after this life. And here I shall shew,

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I. How much may be said for it.

II. How little can be said against it. But before I come to speak particularly to the arguments, which natural reason affords us for the proof of this principle, I shall premise certain general considerations, which may give light and force to the following arguments. As,

First, By the soul we mean a part of man distinct from his body, or a principle in him which is not matter. I choose rather to describe it this way, than by the essential properties of it, which are hard to fix upon, and are more remote from common apprehension. Our Saviour, when he would convince his disciples, after his resurrection, that the body wherein he appeared to them was a real body, and that he was not a spirit or apparition, he bids them touch and handle him; "For (says he) a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me to have." So that by the soul or spirit of a man, we mean some principle in man, which is really distinct from his visible and sensible part, from all that in man which affects our outward senses, and which is not to be described by any sensible and external qualities, such as we use to describe a body by: because it is supposed to be of such a nature, as does not fall under the cognizance and notice of any of our senses. And therefore I describe it, by removing from it all those qualities and properties which belong to that which falls under our senses; viz. that it is something in man distinct from his body, a principle in him which is not matter; that principle which is the cause of those several operations, which, by inward sense and experience, we are conscious to ourselves of; such are perception, understanding, memory, will. So that the most plain and popular no-

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tion that we can have of the soul is, that it is something in us which we never saw, and which is the cause of those effects which we find in ourselves; it is the principle whereby we are conscious to ourselves, that we perceive such and such objects, that we see, or hear, or perceive any thing by any other sense; it is that whereby we think and remember, whereby we reason about any thing, and do freely choose and refuse such things as are presented to us. These operations every one is conscious to himself of, and that which is the principle of these, or the cause from whence these proceed, is that which we mean by the soul.

Secondly, By the immortality of the soul, I mean nothing else, but that it survives the body, that when the body dies and falls to the ground, yet this principle, which we call the soul, still remains and lives separate from it; that is, there is still a part of us which is free from the fate of the body, and continues to perform all those operations, to the performance of which the organs of the body are not necessary; that is, when our bodies are destitute of life, and become a dead carcass, there is still something that did belong to us, which retains the power of understanding, which thinks, and reasons, and remembers, and does all these freely.

Thirdly, That he that goes about to prove the soul's immortality, supposeth the existence of a Deity, that there is a God. For although there be a very intimate and strict connexion between the two principles as to us, as being these two great pillars of all religion; yet that which is first and most fundamental to all religion, is the existence of a God; which, if it be not first proved, the best arguments for the soul's immortality lose their force.

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Therefore, as to the present argument, I suppose the being of God as a thing acknowledged, and not now to be proved; which I may the better do, having formerly endeavoured to make good this grand principle of religion, against the pretensions of the atheists.

Fourthly, The existence of a God being supposed, this doth very much facilitate the other, of the soul's immortality. For this being an essential property of that Divine nature, that he is a spirit, that is, something that is not matter; it being once granted that God is, thus much is gained, that there is such a thing as a spirit, an immaterial substance, that is not liable to die or perish; so that he that goes about to prove the immortality of the soul, shall not need to prove that there may be such a thing as a spirit, that the notion of an immaterial substance does not imply a contradiction; because, supposing that there is a God, who is essentially a spirit, there can be no doubt of the possibility of such a thing as a spirit; and though there be this difference between God and all other spirits, that he is an infinite spirit, whereas others are but finite; yet no man that grants the existence of an infinite spirit, can with any pretence or colour of reason deny the possibility of a finite spirit.

Fifthly, and lastly, It is highly reasonable that men should acquiesce and rest satisfied in such reasons and arguments for the proof of any thing, as the nature of the thing to be proved will bear; because there are several kinds and degrees of evidence, which all things are not equally capable of. It is sufficient that the evidence be such as the nature of the thing to be proved will admit of, and such as prudent men make no scruple to admit for sufficient

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evidence for things of the like nature, and such as, supposing the thing to be, we cannot ordinarily expect better, or greater evidence for it.

There are two kinds of evidences, which are the highest and most satisfactory that this world affords to us; and those are, the evidence of sense, and mathematical demonstration. Now there are many things, concerning which the generality of men profess themselves to be well satisfied, which do not afford either of these kinds of evidence. There is none of us but doth firmly believe that we were born, though we do not remember any such thing; no man's memory does furnish him with the testimony of his senses for this matter, nor can any man prove this by a mathematical demonstration, nor by any necessary argument, so as to shew it impossible that the thing should be otherwise. For it is possible that a man may come into the world otherwise, than by the ordinary course of generation, as the first man did, who was created immediately by God; and yet I know no man in the world who doubts in the least concerning this matter, though he have no other argument for it, but the testimony of others, and his own observation, how other persons like himself came into the world. And it is reasonable to acquiesce in this evidence, because the nature of the thing affords no greater. We, who never were at Jerusalem, do firmly believe that there is such a place, upon the testimony and relation of others: and no man is blamed for this, as being over-credulous; because no man, that will not take the pains to go thither, can have any other greater evidence of it, than the general testimony of those who say they have seen it. And indeed almost all human affairs, I am sure the most important, are governed and

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conducted by such evidence, as falls very much short, both of the evidence of sense and of mathematical demonstration.

To apply this then to my present purpose. That the soul of man is of an immortal nature, is not capable of all kinds and degrees of evidence. It cannot be proved by our senses, nor is it reasonable to expect it should be so proved; because the soul is supposed, by every one that discourseth of it, to be a thing of such a nature, as cannot be seen or handled, or fall under any other of our senses: nor can it be proved to us by our own experience, while we are in this world; because whoever dies, which is the only trial that can be made whether our souls remain after our bodies, goes out of this world. As for mathematical demonstration, the nature of the thing renders it incapable of it. It remains, then, that we rest contented with such arguments as the nature of the thing will bear, and with such evidence as men are contented to accept of, and do account sufficient, in other matters: such evidence, as a prudent considering man, who is not credulous on the one hand, and on the other is not prejudiced by any interest against it, would rest satisfied in.

Having premised these general considerations to clear my way, I now come to speak to the particular arguments, whereby the immortality of the soul may be made out to our reason. And the best way to estimate the force of the arguments which I shall bring for it, will be to consider beforehand with ourselves what evidence we can, in reason, expect for a thing of this nature. Suppose our souls be immortal; by what kind of arguments could we desire to be assured of it? Setting aside miracles

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and Divine revelation, could we desire more than this?—

I. That the thing be a natural notion and dictate of our minds.

II. That it doth not contradict any other principle that nature hath planted in us, but does very well accord and agree with all other the most natural notions of our minds.

III. That it be suitable to our natural fears and hopes.

IV. That it tends to the happiness of man, and the good order and government of the world.

V. That it gives the most rational account of all those inward actions which we are conscious to ourselves of, as perception, understanding, memory, will; which we cannot, without great unreasonableness, ascribe to matter as the cause of them. If all these be thus, as I shall endeavour to make it appear they are, what greater satisfaction could we desire to have of the immortality of our souls, than these arguments give us? I do not say that any one of these arguments doth sufficiently conclude this thing; nor is it necessary, that, taken singly and by themselves, they should do it; it is sufficient that they concur to make up one entire argument, which may be a sufficient evidence of the soul's immortality. To illustrate this by an instance: suppose a man should use these two arguments, to prove that such a man deserves to be credited in such a relation:—first, because he had sufficient knowledge of the thing he relates; and, secondly, because he is a man of integrity and fidelity. Neither of these alone would prove the man to be worthy of credit, though both together make up a good argument. So it is in these arguments which I have

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produced; it may be no one of them is a sufficient inducement, taken singly and by itself, to satisfy a man fully that the soul is immortal; and yet they may concur together to make a very powerful argument. I begin with the

I. First, That our souls are of an immortal nature, that they do not die and perish with our bodies, but pass into another state upon the dissolution of our bodies, is a natural notion and dictate of our minds. That I call a natural notion, which the minds of all men do naturally hit upon and agree in, notwithstanding the distance and remoteness of the several parts of the world from one another, notwithstanding the different tempers, and manner and ways of education. The only way to measure whether any thing be natural or not, is by inquiring, whether it agree to the whole kind or not: if it do, then we call it natural. *Omnium consensus naturæ vox est*, "The consent of all is the voice of nature," says Tully, speaking of the universal agreement of all nations in this apprehension, that the souls of men remain after their bodies. And this he tells us he looks upon as a very great argument: *Maximum vere argumentum est, naturam ipsam de immortalitate animarum tacitam judicare, quod omnibus curæ sint, et maxime quidem, quæ post mortem futura sunt:* "This is a very great argument, that nature doth secretly, and in men's silent thoughts, determine the immortality of the soul, that all men are solicitous of what shall become of them after death." *Nescio quomodo inhæret in mentibus quasi seculorum quoddam augurium futurorum, idque in maximis ingeniis altissimisque animis et existit maxime et apparet facillime:* "I know not how (saith he) there sticks in the mind a certain kind of presage of a fu-

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ture state, and this is most deeply fixed, and discovers itself soonest in the choicest spirits." Again the same author, *Ut deos esse natura opinamur, sic permanere animos arbitramur consensu nationum omnium:* "As this opinion is planted in us by nature, that there is a God, by the consent of all nations we believe that souls remain after the body." I might multiply testimonies to this purpose out of the ancient heathen writers; but these which I have produced out of this great author are so plain and express, that I need bring no other.

As for those barbarous nations which have been discovered in these latter ages of the world, and which, before the first planting of America, were never known to have held correspondence with these parts of the world, yet all those nations agree in this principle, of the immortality of the soul; nay, even the most barbarous of those nations, those who are most inhuman and eat one another, those of Joupinamboult, in Brasil, who are said by some authors, but I think not upon sufficient grounds, not to acknowledge the being of a God; yet even these (as Lerius tells us, who lived among them) had a very fixed and firm persuasion of this principle of religion, the immortality of the soul. "There is not (says he) any nation in the world more remote from all religion than these were; yet to shew that there is some light in the midst of this darkness, I can (says he) truly affirm, that they have not only some apprehensions of the immortality of the soul, but a most confident persuasion of it. Their opinion (says he) is, that the souls of stout and valiant men after death fly beyond the highest mountains, and there are gathered to their fathers and grandfathers, and live in pleasant gardens, with all



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manner of delights; but the souls of slothful and inactive men, and those who do nothing for their country, are carried to Aygman (so they call the devil) and live with him in perpetual torments." The like Xaverius and others, who laboured in the conversion of the remote parts of the East Indies, tell us concerning those nations, that they found them generally possessed with this principle, of the soul's immortality.

Now what will we call a natural notion, if not that which mankind, in all places of the world, in all ages, so far as history informs, did universally agree in? What evidence greater than this can any man give, to shew that any thing is natural? And if we believe a God (which I told you I do all along in this argument suppose to be already proved), can we imagine that this wise and good God would plant such a notion and apprehension in the understandings of men, as would put an universal cheat and delusion upon human nature?

And that the universal consent of all nations in this principle cannot be resolved either into the fears and groundless jealousy and superstition of human nature, nor into universal tradition, which had its original from some impostor, nor into reason and policy of state, I might shew particularly: but, having formerly done that, concerning the universal consent of all nations in the belief of a God, and the reason being the very same, as to this principle of the immortality of the soul, I shall not need to do this over again upon this argument.

And that some persons, and particular sects in the world, have disowned this principle, is no sufficient objection against it. It cannot be denied, but the Epicureans among the philosophers did re-

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nounce this principle; and some also among the stoics dospeak doubtfully of it. The Sadducees, likewise, among the Jews fell into this error, upon a mistake and misapprehension of the doctrine of their master, Sadoc, who, as Josephus tells us, did use to inculcate this principle to his scholars, that though there were no rewards nor punishments after this life, yet men ought to be good and live virtuously; from whence, in process of time, by heat of opposition against the pharisees, who brought in oral tradition, and made it equal with the written word of God, they fell into that error, and denied the soul's immortality, not finding such clear texts for it in the Old Testament as to them did seem fully convincing of this truth. Xaverius likewise tells us, that among the several sects of religion which he found in Japan, there was one which denied the immortality of the soul, and that there were any spirits; but he says they were a sort of notoriously wicked and vicious persons.

To these instances, which are so few, and bear no proportion to the generality of mankind, I have these two things to say:

1. That no argument can be drawn *a monstro ad naturam*. A thing may be natural, and yet some instances may be brought to the contrary: but these are but few in comparison, and like monsters, which are no argument against nature. No man will deny that it is natural for men to have two eyes, and five fingers upon a hand; though there are several instances of men born but with one eye, and with four or six fingers.

2. But especially in matters of religion and discourse, which are subject to liberty, men may offer violence to nature, and, to gratify their lusts and



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interests, may by false reasonings debauch their understanding, and by long striving against the natural bent and bias of it, may alter their apprehensions of things, and persuade others to the same: but nothing that is against nature can prevail very far, but nature will still be endeavouring to recover itself, and to free itself from the violence which is offered to it. So that men's understandings, left to themselves, and not having some false bias put upon them, out of a design of pride, and singularity in opinion, which was the case of Epicurus; or out of the interest of some lust, and a design to set men at liberty to sin, which is the case of most who have renounced this principle: I say, nothing but one of these two can ordinarily make men deny the immortality of the soul. Thus I have done with the first argument; namely, that the immortality of the soul is a natural notion and dictate of our minds.

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# SERMON CLXXIV.

## OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, AS DISCOVERED BY NATURE AND BY REVELATION.

*But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*—2 TIM. i. 10.

I PROCEED to the second argument, that this notion or principle of the immortality of the soul, doth not contradict any other principle that nature hath planted in us, but doth very well accord and agree with all those other notions which are most natural. I shall mention two, which seem to be the most natural notions that we have, and the most deeply rooted in our natures; the one is the existence and the perfections of God; and the other the difference of good and evil. Mankind do universally agree in these two principles, that there is a God who is essentially good and just, and that there is a real difference between good and evil, which is not founded in the opinion and imaginations of persons, or in the custom and usage of the world, but in the nature of things. Now this principle of the immortality of the soul, and future rewards after this life, is so far from clashing with either of these principles, that the contrary assertion, viz. that our souls are mortal, and that there is nothing to be hoped for, or feared, beyond this life, would very much contradict those other principles. To shew this then particularly,

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1. The immortality of the soul is very agreeable to the natural notion which we have of God, one part whereof is, that he is essentially good and just.

(1.) For his goodness. It is very agreeable to that, to think that God would make some creatures for as long a duration as they are capable of. The wisdom of God hath chosen to display itself, in creating variety of things of different degrees and perfections; things devoid of life and sense; and several degrees and orders of sensitive creatures, of different shapes and figures, of different magnitude; some vastly great, others extremely little, others of middle sort between these. And himself being a pure spirit, we have no reason to doubt, but he could make creatures of a spiritual nature, and such as should have no principle of self-corruption in them. And seeing he could make creatures of such perfection, if we believe him to be essentially good, we have no reason to doubt, but that he hath done so. For it is the very nature of goodness to communicate and diffuse itself, and to delight in doing so; and we cannot imagine, but that the same goodness which prompted and inclined him to give being to those creatures which are of an inferior degree of perfection, would move him likewise to make creatures more perfect, and capable of greater degrees of happiness, and of a longer enjoyment of it, if it were in his power to make such; and no man that believes the omnipotency of God can doubt of this. For he who by a pure act of his will can command things to be, and in an instant to start out of nothing, can as easily make one sort of creatures as another. Now the power of God being supposed, his goodness secures us of his will:

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for we cannot imagine any such thing as envy in a Being which we suppose to be perfectly good; nothing being more inconsistent with perfect goodness, than to be unwilling to communicate happiness to others, and to grudge that others should partake of it.

Now this being supposed, that God could and would make creatures of a spiritual and immortal nature, and the utmost imaginable perfections of such creatures being knowledge and liberty, wherever these perfections are found, we have reason to conclude that creature to be endowed with a principle that is of a spiritual and immortal nature. Now these perfections of understanding and will being found in man, this argues him to be endowed with such a principle, as is in his own nature capable of an immortal duration.

It is true, indeed, this spiritual part of man, which we call his soul, is united to a visible and material part, viz. his body; the union of which parts constitutes a peculiar sort of creature, which is *utriusque mundi nexus*, unites the material and immaterial world, the world of matter and of spirits. And as it is very suitable to the wisdom of God, which delights in variety, that there should be a sort of creatures compounded of both these principles, matter and spirit; so it is very agreeable to his goodness to think, that he would design such creatures for as long a duration and continuance as they were capable of. For as it is the effects of goodness to bring creatures forth into the possession of that life and happiness which they are capable of; so to continue them in the enjoyment of it for so long as they are capable.

The sum of all this is, that as it is agreeable to

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the wisdom of God, which made the world, to display itself in all variety of creatures; so it is agreeable to his goodness, to make some of as perfect a kind as creatures are capable of being. Now it being no repugnancy nor contradiction, that a creature should be of a spiritual and immortal nature, we have no reason to think, but that the fruitfulness of the Divine goodness hath brought forth such creatures; and if there be reason to conclude any thing to be of a spiritual and immortal nature, certainly the principle of understanding and liberty, which we are conscious of in ourselves, deserves to be reputed such.

(2.) It is very agreeable to the justice of God, to think the souls of men remain after this life, that there may be a state of reward and recompence in another world. If we believe God to be holy and just, we cannot but believe that he loves righteousness and goodness, and hates iniquity; and that, as he is governor and public magistrate of the world, he is concerned to countenance and encourage the one, and to discountenance and discourage the other. Now the providences of God being in a great measure promiscuously administered in this world, so that no man can make any certain judgment of God's love and hatred towards persons by what befals them in this world, it being the lot of good men many times to suffer and be afflicted, and of wicked men to live in a flourishing and prosperous condition; I say, things being thus, it is very agreeable to those notions which we have of the Divine holiness and justice, to believe that there will a time come, when this wise and just Governor of the world will make a wide and visible difference between the righteous and the wicked; so that

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though for a while the justice of God may be clouded, yet there will a time come when it shall be clearly manifested, and every eye see it and bear witness to it; when "judgment shall break forth as the light, and righteousness as the noon-day." It is possible that sin for a while may go unpunished, nay, triumph and prosper; and that virtue and innocence may not only be unrewarded, but oppressed, and despised, and persecuted. And this may be reconcileable enough to the wisdom of God's providence and the justice of it, supposing the immortality of the soul, and another state after this life, wherein all things shall be set straight, and every man shall receive according to his works: but unless this be supposed, it is impossible to solve the justice of God's providence. Who will believe that the affairs of the world are administered by him who loves righteousness, and hates all the workers of iniquity, who will not let the least service that is done to him pass unrewarded, nor, on the other hand, acquit the guilty, and let sin go unpunished, which are the properties of justice; I say, who will believe this, that looks into the course of the world, and sees with how little difference and distinction of good and bad the affairs of it are managed? That sees virtue discountenanced and despised, poor and destitute, afflicted and tormented; when wickedness is many times exalted to high places, and makes a great noise and ruffle in the world? He that considers what a hazard many times good men run, how for goodness' sake they venture, and many times quit all the contentments and enjoyments of this life, and submit to the greatest sufferings and calamities that human nature is capable of; while in the mean time prosperity is poured into the lap of the wicked, and

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Heaven seems to look pleasantly upon those that deal treacherously, and to be silent whilst the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than himself; he that considers this, and can, without supposing another life after this, pretend to vindicate the justice of these things, must be as blind as the fortune that governs them. Would not this be a perpetual stain and blemish upon the Divine Providence, that Abel, who offered up a better sacrifice than Cain, and "had this testimony, that he pleased God;" yet, after all this, should have no other reward for it, but to be slain by his brother, who had offended God by a slight and contemptuous offering? If there were no reward to be expected after this life, would not this have been a sad example to the world, to see one of the first men that served God acceptably thus rewarded? What a pitiful encouragement would it be to men to be good, to see profane Esau blessed with the dew of heaven, and fatness of the earth; and to hear good old Jacob, in the end and conclusion of his days, to complain, "Few and evil have the days of my pilgrimage been!" If this had been the end of Esau and Jacob, it would puzzle all the wit and reason of mankind to wipe off this reproach from the providence of God, and vindicate the justice of it. And therefore I do not wonder, that the greatest wits among the heathen philosophers were so much puzzled with this objection against the providence of God—If the wise, and just, and good God do administer the affairs of the world, and be concerned in the good or bad actions of men, *cur bonis male et malis bene?* "How comes it to pass, that good men many times are miserable, and bad men so happy in the world?" And they had no other way to wipe off this objection,

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but by referring these things to another world, wherein the temporal sufferings of good men should be eternally rewarded, and the short and transient happiness of wicked men should be rendered insignificant, and drowned in an eternity of misery.

So that, if we believe the being of God, and the providence of God (which I do all along take for granted in this argument), there is no other way imaginable to solve the equity and justice of God's providence, but upon this supposition—that there is another life after this. For to say, that virtue is a sufficient and abundant reward for itself, though it have some truth in it, if we set aside those sufferings, and miseries, and calamities, which virtue is frequently attended with in this life; yet, if these be taken in, it is but a very jejune and dry speculation. For considering the strong propension and inclination of human nature to avoid these evils and inconveniencies, a state of virtue attended with great sufferings, would be so far from being a happiness, that it would be a real misery; so that the determination of the apostle (1 Cor. xv. 19.) is according to nature, and the truth and reason of things, that, "If in this life only we had hope, we were of all men most miserable." For although it be true, that, as things now stand, and as the nature of man is framed, good men do find a strange kind of inward pleasure and secret satisfaction of mind in the discharge of their duty, and doing what is virtuous; yet every man that looks into himself and consults his own breast, will find that this delight and contentment springs chiefly from the hopes which men conceive, that a holy and virtuous life shall not be unrewarded: and without these hopes virtue is but a dead and empty name; and notwithstanding the reasonableness of

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virtuous actions compared with the contrary of them, yet when virtue came to be incumbered with difficulties, and to be attended with such sufferings and inconveniencies, as were grievous and intolerable to human nature, then it would appear unreasonable to choose that for a happiness, which would rob a man of all the felicity of his life. For though a man were never so much in love with virtue for the native beauty and comeliness of it; yet it would strangely cool his affection to it, to consider that he should be undone by the match; that when he had it, he must go a begging with it, and be in danger of death, for the sake of that which he had chosen for the felicity of his life. So that, how devout soever the woman might be, yet I dare say she was not over-wise and considerate, who, going about with a pitcher of water in one hand, and a pan of coals in the other, and being asked what she intended to do with them, answered, that she intended with the one to burn up heaven, and with the other to quench hell, that men might love God and virtue for their own sakes, without hope of reward or fear of punishment.

And the consequence of this dry doctrine does sufficiently appear in the sect of the Sadducees, which had its rise from this principle of Sadoc, the master of the sect, who, out of an indiscreet zeal to teach something above others, and indeed above the pitch of human nature, inculcated this doctrine upon his scholars—that religion and virtue ought to be loved for themselves, though there were no reward of virtue to be hoped, nor punishment of vice to be feared, in another world; from which his disciples inferred, that it was not necessary to religion to believe a future state, and, in process of time, peremptorily maintained, that there was no life

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after this. For they did not only deny the resurrection of the body, but, as St. Paul tells us, they said, that "there was neither angel nor spirit;" that is, they denied that there was any thing of an immortal nature, that did remain after this life. And what the consequence of this was, we may see in the character which Josephus gives of that sect; for he tells, that the commonalty of the Jews were of the sect of the Pharisees, but most of the great and rich men were Sadducees; which plainly shews, that this dry speculation, of loving religion and virtue for themselves, without any expectation of future rewards, did end in their giving over all serious pursuit of religion; and, because they hoped for nothing after this life, therefore laying aside all other considerations, they applied themselves to the present business of this life, and grasped as much of the present enjoyments of its power and riches, as they could by any means attain to.

And for a farther evidence of this, that it is only or principally the hopes of a future happiness that bear men up in the pursuit of virtue, that give them so much comfort and satisfaction in the prosecution of it, and make men encounter the difficulties, and oppositions, and persecutions they meet withal in the ways of religion, with so much undauntedness and courage; I say, for the farther evidence of this, I shall only offer this consideration—that, according to the degree of this hope and assurance of another life, men's constancy and courage in the ways of virtue and religion have been. Before Christ's coming into the world, and the bringing of "life and immortality to light by the gospel," we do not find in all ages of the world, so many instances of patience and constant suffering for religion, as happened in the

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first age after Christ. God did not think fit to try the world so much in this kind, till they were furnished with a principle which would bear them up under the greatest sufferings, which was nothing else but the full assurance which the gospel gave the world of a blessed immortality after this life; the firm belief and persuasion of which, made Christians dead to the world, and all the contentments and enjoyments of it, and by raising them above all the pleasures and terrors of sense, made them to despise present things, "in hopes of eternal life, which God that could not lie had promised." This was that which set them above the fears of death, so that they were not to be frightened out of their religion by the most exquisite torments, and all the most horrid and fearful shapes, that the malice of men and devils could dress up misery and affliction in. Whereas, under the old dispensation of the law, before the revelation of the gospel, when the promises of eternal life were not so clear, and men's hopes of it more weak and faint, the express encouragement to obedience was founded in the promises of temporal blessings; God herein complying with the necessity of human nature, which is not to be wrought upon to any great purpose, but by arguments of advantage.

The sum of this argument, which I have thus largely dilated upon, because I look upon it as one of the most strong and convincing of the soul's immortality, is this; that the justice of God's providence cannot sufficiently be vindicated, but upon the supposal of this principle of the soul's immortality: whereas, if this principle be admitted, that men pass out of this life into an eternal state of happiness or misery, according as they have behaved

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themselves in this world; then the account of the unequal providences of God in this world is easy. For if we look upon this life as a state of probation, of trial to wicked men, and of exercise to good men, in order to a future and eternal state; and if we consider withal, how vast the difference is between time and eternity; it will be easy then to apprehend how all things may be set straight in another world, and how the righteousness of God may appear, in giving an abundant recompence to good men for all their temporal service and sufferings, which do but prepare them the more for a quicker relish of the glory and happiness which is reserved for them; and, on the other hand, in punishing wicked men, whose short ease and prosperity in this world will, by the just judgment of God for their abuse of the blessings of this life, set out their misery and torment to the greatest disadvantage. For, as nothing commends happiness more than precedent sorrow; so nothing makes pain and suffering more bitter and intolerable, than to step into them out of a state of ease and pleasure; so that the pleasures and prosperity of wicked men in this life, considered with the punishment of the next, which will follow upon them, is an addition to their misery. This is the very sting of the second death; and in this sense also that of the wise man is true—"The ease of the simple will slay them;" and the prosperity of these fools shall be the great aggravation of their destruction.

2. Another notion which is deeply rooted in the nature of man, is, that there is a difference between good and evil, which is not founded in the imagination of persons, or in the custom and usage of the world, but in the nature of things: that there are some things which have a natural evil, and turpi-

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tude, and deformity in them; for example, impiety and profaneness towards God, injustice and unrighteousness towards men, perfidiousness, injury, ingratitude; these are things that are not only condemned by the positive laws and constitutions of particular nations and governments, but by the general verdict and sentiments of humanity. Piety and religion towards God; justice, and righteousness, and fidelity, and reverence of oaths; regard to a man's word and promise; and gratitude towards those who have obliged us;—these and the like qualities, which we call virtues, are not only well spoken of, where they are countenanced by the authority of law, but have the tacit approbation and veneration of mankind. And any man that thinks that these things are not naturally and in themselves good, but are merely arbitrary, and depend upon the pleasure of authority, and the will of those who have the power of imposing laws upon others; I say, any such person may easily be convinced of his error, by putting this supposition:—suppose wickedness were established by a law, and the practice of fraud, and rapine, and perjury, falseness in a man's word and promises, were commended and rewarded; and it were made a crime for any man to be honest, to have any regard to his oath or promise; and the man that should dare to be honest, or make good his word, should be severely punished, and made a public example; I say, suppose the reverse of all that which we now call virtue were solemnly enacted by a law, and public authority should enjoin the practice of that which we call vice; what would the consequence of this be, when the tables were thus turned? Would that which we now call vice gain the esteem and reputation of virtue; and those things which

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we now call virtue, grow contemptible and become odious to human nature? If not, then there is a natural and intrinsical difference between good and evil, between virtue and vice; there is something in the nature of these things which does not depend upon arbitrary constitution. And I think nothing can be more evident, than that the authority which should attempt such an establishment, would thereby be rendered ridiculous, and all laws of such a tendency as this would be hissed out of the world. And the reason of this is plain, because no government could subsist upon these terms: for the very forbidding men to be just and honest, the enjoining of fraud, and violence, and perjury, and breach of trust, would apparently destroy the end of government, which is to preserve men and their rights against the encroachments and inconveniences of these: and this end being destroyed, human society would presently disband, and men would naturally fall into a state of war: which plainly shews that there is a natural, and immutable, and eternal reason for that which we call goodness and virtue; and against that which we call vice and wickedness.

To come then to my purpose, it is very agreeable to this natural notion of the difference between good and evil, to believe the soul's immortality. For nothing is more reasonable to imagine, than that good and evil, as they are differenced in their nature, so they shall be in their rewards; that it shall one time or other be well to them that do well, and evil to the wicked man. Now seeing this difference is not made in this world, but all things happen alike to all, the belief of this difference between good and evil, and the different rewards belonging to them, infers another state after this life, which is the very



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thing we mean by the soul's immortality; namely, that it does not die with the body, but remains after it, and passeth into a state wherein it shall receive a reward suitable to the actions of this life.

And thus I have done with the second argument for the soul's immortality; namely, that this principle doth not contradict those other principles which nature hath planted in us, but doth very well accord and agree with those natural notions which we have of the goodness of God, and of the justice of his providence, and of the real and intrinsical difference between good and evil.

III. This principle, of the soul's immortality, is suitable to the natural hopes and fears of men.

To the natural hopes of men. Whence is it that men are so desirous to purchase a lasting fame, and to perpetuate their memory to posterity, but that they hope that there is something belonging to them, which shall survive the fate of the body, and when that lies in the silent grave, shall be sensible of the honour which is done to their memory, and shall enjoy the pleasure of the just and impartial fame, which shall speak of them to posterity without envy or flattery? And this is a thing incident to the greatest and most generous spirits; none so apt as they to feed themselves with these hopes of immortality. What was it made those great spirits among the Romans so freely to sacrifice their lives for the safety of their country, but an ambition that their names might live after them, and be mentioned with honour when they were dead and gone? Which ambition of theirs, had it not been grounded in the hopes of immortality, and a natural opinion of another life after this, in which they might enjoy the delight and satisfaction of the fame which they had

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purchased, nothing could have been more vain and unreasonable. If there were no hopes of a life beyond this, what is there in fame that should tempt any man to forego this present life, with all the contentments and enjoyments of it? What is the pleasure of being well spoken of, when a man is not? What is the happiness which men can promise to themselves, when they are out of being, when they can enjoy nothing, nor be sensible of any thing, because they are not? So that the spring of all those brave and gallant actions, which the heathens did with the hazard of their lives, out of a desire of after-fame and glory; I say, the spring of all those actions, could be no other than the hopes of another life after this, in which they made account to enjoy the pleasure of the fame, which they purchased with the expense and loss of this present life.

But this ardent desire and impatient thirst after fame, concerns but a few of mankind in comparison. I shall therefore instance in something which is more common and general to mankind, which plainly argues this hope of immortality. What is the ground of that peace, and quiet, and satisfaction, which good men find in good and virtuous actions, but that they have a secret persuasion, and comfortable hopes, that they shall sometime or other be rewarded? and we find that they maintain these even when they despair of any reward in this world. Now what do these hopes argue, but a secret belief of a future state, and another life after this, wherein men shall receive the reward of their actions, and inherit the fruit of their doings? Whence is it else, that good men, though they find that goodness suffers, and is persecuted in this world, and that the best designs are many times unsuccessful; what is it that



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bears them up under these disappointments, and makes them constant in a virtuous course, but this hope of another life, in a better state of things hereafter? They have some secret presage in their own minds of a life after death, which will be a time of recompence, as this is of trial.

2. The same may be argued from the natural fears of men. Whence is the secret shame, and fear, and horror, which seizeth upon the minds of men, when they are about a wicked action; yea, though no eye see them, and though what they are doing do not fall under the cognizance of any human court or tribunal? Whence is it that they meet with such checks and rebukes in their own spirits, and feel such a disturbance and confusion in their minds, when they do a vile and unworthy thing; yea, although it be so secretly contrived and so privately managed, that no man can charge them with it, or call them to account for it? What art thou afraid of, man, if there be no life after this? Why do thy joints tremble, and thy knees knock together, if thou beest in no danger from any thing in this world, and hast no fears of the other? If men had not a natural dread of another world, and sad and dreadful presages of future vengeance, why do not men sin with assurance when no eye sees them? Why are not men secure, when they have only imagined a mischief privately in their own hearts, and no creature is privy and conscious to it? Why do men's own consciences lash and sting them for these things, which they might do with as great impunity from men in this world, as the most virtuous actions? Whence is it that *cogitare, peccare est*, as Min. Felix expresseth it, *et non solum conscios timet, sed et conscientiam?* Whence is it that "a wicked

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man is guilty upon account merely of his thoughts, and is not only fearful because of those things which others are conscious of, but because of those things which nobody knows but his own conscience?" Whence is it that,

*Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,*
*Facti crimen habet?*

That "he that does but devise and imagine secret mischief in his heart, is guilty to himself, as if the fact had been committed?" And when no man can charge and accuse him for it, yet,

*Nocte dieque suum gestat in pectore testem:*

"He carries his accuser in his breast, who does night and day incessantly witness against him?"

And that these fears are natural, the sudden rise of them is a good evidence. They do not proceed from deliberation, men do not reason themselves into these fears, but they spring up in men's minds they know not how; which shews that they are natural. Now, a man's natural actions, I mean, such as surprise us, and do not proceed from deliberation, are better arguments of the intimate sense of our minds, and do more truly discover the bottom of our hearts, and those notions that are implanted in our natures, than those actions which are governed by reason and discourse, and proceed from deliberation. To demonstrate this by an instance: if a man upon a sudden sight of a snake, do recoil and start back, tremble and grow pale; this is a better argument of a natural antipathy and fear, than it is of a natural courage, if afterward, when he hath commanded down his fear, he should by his rea-

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son persuade himself to take up the snake into his hand. If you would know what a man's natural apprehensions are, take him on the sudden, and give him no time to deliberate. Therefore, some cunning politicians have used this way of surprise and sudden questions, to dive into the hearts of men, and discover their secrets.

In like manner, if you would know what men's natural apprehensions are concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state, observe what men's first thoughts are, whether a man's conscience does not suggest to him such fears upon the commission of sin. There is no doubt but men may offer violence to their natures, and reason themselves into great doubts about the soul's immortality; nay, men may be bribed into the contrary opinion: but this man who, in his deliberate discourses, denies any reward after this life, shall, by his natural actions, acknowledge them, by those fears and terrors, which his guilty conscience is ever and anon surprised withal.

The sum of this argument is, that it is natural for men that live piously and virtuously, that do just, and honest, and worthy actions, to conceive good hopes that it shall some time or other be well with them; that however they may meet with no reward and recompence in this world, yet "verily there will be a reward for the righteous:" and, on the other hand, wicked men, though they flourish and prosper in their wickedness, yet they are not free from guilt, they are fearful and timorous, even when their condition sets them above the fear of any man upon earth. Now, what does this signify, but that they have some secret presages of an after-punishment? Nature suggests this thought to them, that

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there will be a time when all the sins which they have committed, and the wickedness which they have done, shall be accounted for.

And it is no prejudice to this truth, that some men sin against their consciences, and by frequent acts of sin, and offering notorious violence to their own light, bring themselves into a brawny and insensible condition, so that they have not those stings and lashes, are not haunted with those fears and terrors, which pursue common sinners. This is but reasonable to be expected, that men, by frequent acts of sin, should lose the tender sense which men's consciences naturally have of good and evil; that men that lay waste their consciences by gross and notorious sins, should lose the sense of good and evil, and that their consciences should grow hard, like a beaten road; nay, it is suitable to the justice of God, to give up such persons to a reprobate sense, to an injudicious mind, that they, who would not be awakened and reclaimed by the natural fear of Divine justice, which God hath hid in every man's conscience, should at last lose all sense and apprehension of these things, and be permitted securely and without remorse to perfect their own ruin.

IV. This doctrine of the immortality of the soul, does evidently tend to the happiness and perfection of man, and to the good order and government of the world: to the happiness and perfection of man, both considered singly, and in society.

1. To the happiness and perfection of man, considered in his single capacity, if it be a thing desirable to be at all, then it is a thing desirable to be continued in being as long as may be, and for ever if it be possible. If life be a perfection, then eter-

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nal life is much more so; especially if the circumstances of this present life be considered, together with the state which we hope for hereafter. The condition of men in this present life, is attended with so many frailties, liable to so great miseries and sufferings, to so many pains and diseases, to such various causes of sorrow and trouble, of fear and vexation, by reason of the many hazards and uncertainties, which not only the comforts and contentments of our lives, but even life itself, is liable to, that the pleasure and happiness of it is by these very much rebated: so that were not men trained on with the hopes of something better hereafter, life itself would to many men be an insupportable burden: if men were not supported and borne up under the anxieties of this present life, with the hopes and expectations of a happier state in another world, mankind would be the most imperfect and unhappy part of God's creation. For although other creatures be subjected to a great deal of vanity and misery, yet they have this happiness—that as they are made for a short duration and continuance, so they are only affected with the present, they do not fret and discontent themselves about the future, they are not liable to be cheated with hopes, nor tormented with fears, nor vexed at disappointments, as the sons of men are.

But if our souls be immortal, this makes abundant amends and compensation for the frailties of this life, and all the transitory sufferings and inconveniences of this present state; human nature, considered with this advantage, is infinitely above the brute beasts that perish.

As for those torments and miseries which we are liable to in another world, far greater than any

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thing that men suffer in this life, this ought not, in reason, to be objected against the immortality of the soul, as if this doctrine did not tend to the happiness and perfection of man: for if this be truly the case of mankind, that God hath made men's souls of an immortal nature, and designed them for a perpetual duration and continuance in another state after this life, in order to which state he hath placed every man in this world, to be, as it were, a candidate for eternity, he hath furnished every man with such helps and advantages, such opportunities and means for the attaining of everlasting happiness, that if he be not grossly wanting to himself, he shall not miscarry; if this be the case, then an immortal nature is a real and mighty privilege. If God puts every man into a capacity of happiness, and if no man becomes miserable but by his own choice, if no man falls short of eternal happiness but by his own fault, then immortality is a privilege in itself, and a curse to none but those who make it so to themselves.

2. This doctrine tends to the happiness of man considered in society, to the good order and government of the world. I do not deny, but if this principle of the immortality of the soul were not believed in the world, if the generality of mankind had no regard to any thing beyond this present life: I say, I do not deny, notwithstanding this, but there would be some kind of government kept up in the world; the necessities of human nature, and the mischiefs of contention, would compel men to some kind of order: but I say withal, that if this principle were banished out of the world, government would want its most firm basis and foundation; there would be infinitely more disorders in the world were men not

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restrained from injustice and violence by principles of conscience, and the awe of another world. And that this is so, is evident from hence, that all magistrates think themselves concerned to cherish religion, and to maintain in the minds of men the belief of a God, and of a future state.

This is the fourth argument—that this doctrine does evidently tend to the happiness of man, and the good order and government of the world. I grant that this argument alone, and taken singly by itself, is far from enforcing and necessarily concluding the soul's immortality: but if the other arguments be of force to conclude, this added to them is a very proper inducement to persuade and incline men to the belief of this principle; it does very well serve the purpose for which I bring it; namely, to shew, that if there be good arguments for it, no man hath reason to be averse or backward to the belief of it; if by other arguments we be convinced of the suitableness of this principle to reason, this consideration will satisfy us, that it is not against our interest to entertain it. And no man that is not resolved to live wickedly, hath reason to desire that the contrary should be true. For what would a man gain by it, if the soul were not immortal, but to level himself with the beasts that perish, and to put himself into a worse and more miserable condition than any of the creatures below him?

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# SERMON CLXXV.

## OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, AS DISCOVERED BY NATURE AND BY REVELATION.

*But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*—2 TIM. i. 10.

THE fifth and last argument is, That this supposition of the soul's immortality, gives the fairest account and easiest solution of the phenomena of human nature, of those several actions and operations which we are conscious to ourselves of, and which, without great violence to our reason, cannot be resolved into a bodily principle, and ascribed to mere matter; such are perception, memory, liberty, and the several acts of understanding and reason. These operations we find in ourselves, and we cannot imagine how they should be performed by mere matter; therefore we ought, in all reason, to resolve them into some principle of another nature from matter, that is, into something that is immaterial, and consequently immortal, that is incapable in its own nature of corruption and dissolution.

And that the force of this argument may the better appear, I shall speak something of these distinctly, and shew that none of these operations can be performed from mere matter. I begin with the

1. First and lowest, which is sensitive perception, which is nothing else but a consciousness to ourselves of our own sensations, an apprehension of the

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impressions which are made upon us; and this faculty is that which constitutes the difference between sensitive and insensitive creatures. A stone may have several impressions made upon it, as well as the living creature endowed with sense; but with this difference, that whatever impressions are made upon a stone, by knocking, cutting, or any other kind of motion or action, the stone is stupid, and is not in the least conscious of any of those impressions, does not perceive what is done to it; whereas those creatures which are endowed with sense, do plainly perceive their own and other motions, they are affected with the impressions made upon them.

Now we can give no account of this operation from mere matter. It is plain, that matter is not in its own nature sensible; for we find the greatest part of the world to consist of insensible parts, and such as have no perception. Now if matter be granted in itself to be insensible, it is utterly unimaginable, how any motion or configuration of the parts of it, should raise that which hath no sense to a faculty of perception. Epicurus fancied those particles of matter, of which souls were framed, to be the finest and smallest; and for their smoother and easier motion, that they were all of a round figure. But supposing matter not to be naturally and of itself sensible, who can conceive what that is which should awaken the drowsy parts of it to a lively sense of the impressions made upon it? it is every whit as easy to imagine how an instrument might be framed and tuned so artificially, as to hear its own sounds, and to be marvellously delighted with them; or that a glass might be polished to that fineness, as to see all those objects which are reflected upon it.

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But there is one difficulty in this: for it may be said, if sensitive perception be an argument of the soul's immateriality, and consequently immortality, then the souls of beasts will be immortal as well as the souls of men. For answer to this, I shall say these things:

(1.) That the most general and common philosophy of the world hath always acknowledged something in beasts besides their bodies, and that the faculty of sense and perception which is in them, is founded in a principle of a higher nature than matter. And as this was always the common philosophy of the world, so we find it to be a supposition of Scripture, which frequently attributes souls to beasts as well as to men, though of a much inferior nature. And therefore those particular philosophers, who have denied any immaterial principle, or a soul to beasts, have also denied them to have sense, any more than a clock, or watch, or any other engine; and have imagined them to be nothing else but a finer and more complicated kind of engines, which, by reason of the curiosity and tenderness of their frame, are more easily susceptible of all kind of motions and impressions from without, which impressions are the cause of all those actions that resemble those sensations which we men find in ourselves: which is to say, that birds, and beasts, and fishes, are nothing else but a more curious sort of puppets, which, by certain secret and hidden weights and springs, do move up and down, and counterfeit the actions of life and sense. This, I confess, seems to me to be an odd kind of philosophy; and it hath this vehement prejudice against it—that if this were true, every man would have great cause to question the reality of his own perceptions; for to all appearance

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the sensations of beasts are as real as ours, and in many things their senses much more exquisite than ours; and if nothing can be a sufficient argument to a man, that he is really endowed with sense, besides his own consciousness of it, then every man hath reason to doubt whether all men in the world besides himself be not mere engines; for no man hath any other evidence, that another man is really endowed with sense, than he hath that brute creatures are so; for they appear to us to see, and hear, and feel, and smell, and taste things, as truly and as exactly as any man in the world does.

(2.) Supposing beasts to have an immaterial principle distinct from their body, it will not from hence follow, that they are immortal, in the sense that we attribute immortality to men. For immortality, when we ascribe it to men, signifies two things.

1. That the soul remains after the body, and is not corrupted and dissolved together with it.

2. That it lives in this separate state, and is sensible of happiness or misery.

1. Immortality imports, that the soul remains after the body, and is not corrupted or dissolved together with it. And there is no inconvenience in attributing this sort of immortality to the brute creatures. And here it is not necessary for us, who know so little of the ways and works of God, and of the secrets of nature, to be able to give a particular account what becomes of the souls of brute creatures after death: whether they return into the soul and spirit of the world, if there be any such thing, as some fancy; or whether they pass into the bodies of other animals which succeed in their rooms: I say, this is not necessary to be particularly determined; it is sufficient to

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lay down this in general as highly probable, that they are such a sort of spirits, which, as to their operation and life, do necessarily depend upon matter, and require union with it; which union being dissolved, they lapse into an insensible condition, and a state of inactivity. For being endowed only with a sensitive principle, the operations of which do plainly depend upon an organical disposition of the body, when the body is dissolved all their activity ceaseth; and when this visible frame of the world shall be dissolved, and this scene of sensible things shall pass away, then it is not improbable that they shall be discharged out of being, and return to their first nothing: for though in their own nature they would continue longer, yet, having served the end of their being, and done their work, it is not unsuitable to the same wisdom that made them, and commanded them into being, to let them sink into their first state.

2. Immortality, as applied to the spirits of men, imports, that their souls are not only capable of continuing, but living in this separate state, so as to be sensible of happiness and misery. For the soul of man being of a higher nature, and not only endowed with a faculty of sense, but likewise other faculties which have no necessary dependance upon, or connexion with, matter; having a sense of God, and of Divine and spiritual things, and being capable of happiness in the enjoyment of God, or of misery in a separation from him; it is but reasonable to imagine, that the souls of men shall be admitted to the exercise of these faculties, and the enjoyment of that life which they are capable of in a separate state. And this is that which constitutes that vast and wide difference between the souls of

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men and beasts: and this degree of immortality is as much above the other, as reason and religion are above sense.

3. Another faculty in us, which argues an immaterial, and consequently an immortal principle in man, is memory; and this likewise is common in some degree to several of the brute creatures, and it seems to be nothing else but a kind of continued sensation of things. And of this we can give no account from mere matter. For if that which we call the soul, were nothing else but, as Epicurus imagined, a little wild-fire, a company of small round particles of matter in perpetual motion, it being a fluid thing, it would be liable to a continual dissipation of its parts, and the new parts that come, would be altogether strangers to the impressions made upon the old: so that, supposing the soul liable but to those changes which the grosser parts of our bodies, our flesh and blood, continually are liable to, by the evaporation and spending of the old, and an accession of new matter; (and if we suppose the soul to be fluid matter, that is, consisting of particles, which are by no kind of connexion linked to one another, it will in all probability be more easily dissipable than the grosser parts of the body; and) if so, how is it imaginable that these new and foreign particles should retain any sense of the impressions made upon those which are gone many years ago?

4. Another faculty which I shall instance in, is the will of man, which is endowed with liberty and freedom, and gives a man dominion over his own actions. Matter moves by necessary and certain laws, and cannot move if it be at rest, unless it be moved by another; and cannot rest, that is, can-

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not but move, if it be impelled by another. Whence then are voluntary motions? Whence is the αὐτεξούσιον, the arbitrary principle which we find in ourselves, the freedom of action to do or not to do this or that, which we are intimately conscious to ourselves of? Of all the operations of our minds, it is the hardest to give an account of liberty from mere matter. This Epicurus was sensible of, and infinitely puzzled with it, as we may see by the question which Lucretius puts: *Unde est hæc, inquam, fatis avulsa voluntas?* "How comes the soul of man to have this peculiar privilege of freedom and liberty, above all other sorts of matter that are in the world? Whence is it, that when all things else move by a fatal necessity, the soul of man should be exempted from that slavery?" He does indeed attempt to give an account of it from a motion of declination which is proper and peculiar to the particles of the soul: but that is a more unintelligible riddle than liberty itself. The

5. Fifth, and last operation I shall instance in, is that of reason and understanding. Not to mention the activity and nimbleness of our thoughts, in the abstracted notions of our minds, the multitude of distinct ideas and notions which dwell together in our souls, none of which are accountable from matter; I shall only instance in two particulars.

(1.) Those acts of reason and judgment whereby we overrule the reports of our senses, and correct the errors and deceptions of them.

(2.) The contemplation of spiritual and Divine things.

(1.) Those acts of reason and judgment whereby we overrule the reports and determinations of sense. Our sense tells us, that things at a distance



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are less, than our reason tells us they are really in themselves; as, that the body of the sun is but about a foot diameter: but our reason informs us otherwise. Now what is the principle that controls our senses, and corrects the deception of them? If the soul of man be mere matter, it can only judge of things according to the impressions which are made upon our senses: but we do judge otherwise, and see reason to do so many times. Therefore it must be some higher principle, which judges of things not by the material impressions which they make upon our senses, but by other measures. And therefore, to avoid this inconvenience, Epicurus was glad, to fly the absurdity, to affirm, that all things really are what they appear to us, and that in truth the sun is no bigger than it seems to be.

(2.) The contemplation of things spiritual and Divine, is an argument that the soul is of a higher original than any thing that is material. To contemplate the nature of God, and the Divine excellences and perfections; the meditation of a future state, and of the happiness of another world; those breathings which good men feel in their souls after God, and the enjoyment of him—argue the spiritual nature of the soul. *Hoc habet argumentum divinitatis suæ* (saith Seneca) *quod eam divina delectant, nec ut alienis interest sed suis:* "The soul of man hath this argument of its Divine original—that it is so strangely delighted, so infinitely pleased and satisfied with the contemplation of Divine things, and is taken up with these thoughts, as if they were its proper business and concernment." Those strong inclinations and desires after immortality, and the pleasure which good men find in the forethoughts of the happiness which they hope to enter into, when

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their souls shall quit these mansions; the restless aspirings of our souls towards God, and those blessed mansions where he dwells, and where the spirits of good men converse with him and one another; these signify our souls to be of a nobler extraction than the earth, that they are descended from above, and that heaven is their country; their thoughts are so much upon it, and they are so desirous to return to it.

I shall conclude this argument, from the noble and excellent operations of our souls, of which we are conscious to ourselves, with a passage of Tully to this purpose:—*Animarum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest: nihil enim est in animis mixtum atque concretum, aut quod ex terra natum atque fictum esse videatur.* "The souls of men have not their original from the earth, it is in vain to seek for it there: for there is nothing in the mind of man of a material mixture and composition, which we can imagine to be born or formed out of the earth. For (says he) among material and earthly things there is nothing," *Quod vim memoriæ, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod et præterita teneat, et futura provideat, et complecti possit præsentia:* "There is no earthly thing which hath the power of memory, of understanding, of thought, which retains things past, foresees and provides for things future, comprehends and considers things present." *Singularis est igitur quædam natura atque vis animi, sejuncta ab his usitatis notisque naturis;* "So that the nature and power of the soul are of a peculiar and singular kind, different from all those natures which we are acquainted with in this world." He concludes, *Itaque quicquid est quod sentit, quod sapit, quod vult, quod viget, cœleste et divinum est, ob eamque rem æternum sit necesse est:*



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"Therefore, whatever that is which is endowed with a power of perception, with wisdom, with liberty, with so much vigour and activity as the soul of man, is of heavenly and Divine original, and for that reason is necessarily immortal, and to continue for ever."

Thus I have represented to you, as briefly and plainly as I could, those which I account the chief and strongest arguments of this great principle of religion—the soul's immortality. Some of them are plain and obvious to every capacity; the rest, though they be above common capacities, yet were not to be neglected, because they may be useful to some, though not to all; and as those who are more wise and knowing should have patience, whilst the most common and plainest things are spoken for the instruction of ordinary capacities, so those of lower capacities should be content that many things should be spoken which may be useful to others, though they be above their reach.

To sum up then what hath been said from reason, for the proof of the soul's immortality. It is a natural dictate and notion of our minds, universally entertained in all ages and places of the world, excepting some very few persons and sects; it doth not contradict any other principle that nature hath planted in us, but doth very well agree with those other notions which are most natural; it is most suitable to the natural hopes and fears of men; it evidently tends to the happiness and perfection of man, and to the good order and government of the world; lastly, it gives the fairest account of the phenomena of human nature, of those several actions and operations which we are conscious to ourselves of.

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Now supposing the soul were immortal, what greater rational evidence than this can we expect for it? How can we without a revelation have more assurance of the things of this nature than these arguments give us, not taken singly, but as they concur together to make up an entire argument, and to give us sufficient evidence of this?

I do not say that these arguments do so necessarily conclude it, that there is an absolute impossibility the thing should be otherwise; but so as to render it sufficiently certain to a prudent and considerate man, and one that is willing to accept of reasonable evidence. For the generality of the papists do pertinaciously maintain this unreasonable principle—that there can be no certainty of any thing without infallibility: yet some of the wiser of them have thought better of it, and are pleased to state the business of certainty otherwise; particularly Melchior Canus, one of the most learned of their writers, determines those things to be sufficiently certain, which no man can without imprudence and obstinacy disbelieve:—*Certa apud homines ea sunt, quæ negari sine pervicacia et stultitia non possunt:* "Men esteem those things certain, which no man that is not unreasonably obstinate and imprudent can deny." And I think the arguments I have brought for the soul's immortality, are such, as no man, that is unprejudiced and hath a prudent regard to his own interest, can resist.

Thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to do for the proof of the soul's immortality; which was to shew, what evidence of reason there is for it. I shall speak briefly to the

Second thing I propounded, which was to shew how little can be said against it, because this will

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indirectly give a strength and force to the arguments I have brought for it. For it is very considerable *in* any question or controversy, what strength there is in the arguments on both sides: for, though very plausible arguments may be brought for a thing, yet, if others as plausible and specious may be urged against it, this leaves the thing *in æquilibrio*, it sets the balance even, and inclines the judgment neither way; nay, if the objections against a *thing* be considerable, though not so strong as the arguments for it, the considerableness of the objections does so far weaken the contrary arguments: but where the arguments on one hand are strong, and the objections on the contrary very slight, and such as may easily be answered, the weakness of the objections contributes to the strength of the arguments for the other side of the question.

To come then to the business, I know but three objections which have any colour against this principle.

I. That the notion of a spirit, or an immaterial substance, does imply a contradiction.

Answer 1.—This is only boldly said, and not the least colour of proof offered for it by the author that asserts it. This objection had indeed been considerable, if it had been made out as clearly as it is confidently affirmed. In the mean time, I think we may take leave to deny, that the notion of a spirit hath any repugnancy in it, till somebody think fit to prove it.

2. I told you that this question, about the soul's immortality, supposeth the existence of God to be already proved; and if there be a God, and it be an essential property of the Divine nature, that he is a spirit, then there is such a thing as a spirit and

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immaterial substance; and consequently, the notion of a spirit hath no contradiction in it: for if it had, there could be no such thing.

II. It is said, there is no express texts for the soul's immortality in the Old Testament.

Answer.—This doth not properly belong to the intrinsical arguments and reason of the thing, but is matter of revelation. And this I shall fully speak to, when I come to shew what evidence the Jews had for the soul's immortality. In the mean time, this may be a sufficient answer to this objection—that there is no absolute necessity why it should be expressly revealed in the Old Testament, if it be, as I have shewn, a natural notion of our minds: for the Scripture supposeth us to be men, and to have an antecedent notion of those truths which are implanted in our nature, and therefore chiefly designs to teach us the way to that eternal happiness which we have a natural notion and hope of. The

III. Third objection is from the near and intimate sympathy which is between the soul and the body, which appears in the vigour and strength of our faculties; as understanding and memory do very much depend upon the temper and disposition of the body, and do usually decay and decline with it.

Answer.—The utmost that this objection signifies, is, that there is an intimate union and conjunction between the soul and the body, which is the cause of the sympathy which we find to be between them: but it does by no means prove, that they are one and the same essence. Now, that there is such an intimate union and connexion between the soul and matter in all creatures endowed with life and sense, is acknowledged by all who affirm the immateriality of souls; though the manner of this

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union be altogether unknown to us: and supposing such an union, it is but reasonable to imagine that there should be such a sympathy, that the body would be affected with the delights and disturbances of the mind, and that the soul should also take part in the pleasures and pains of the body, that by this means it may be effectually excited and stirred up to provide for the supply of our bodily wants and necessities; and from this sympathy, it is easy to give account how it comes to pass, that our faculties of understanding, and memory, and imagination, are more or less vigorous, according to the good or bad temper and disposition of our bodies. For, by the same reason that the mind may be grieved and afflicted at the pains and sufferings of the body, it may likewise be disordered and weakened in its operations by the distempers of the body. So that this objection only proves the soul to be united to the body; but not to be the same thing with it.

END OF VOL. VII.

J. F. Dove, Printer, St. John's Square.

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